The Importance of Child Hearing Screening by Nichole Kingham

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Did you know that hearing loss is the number one birth defect in the US? Did you know that more than 90% of children with permanent hearing loss are born to "hearing" parents? Hearing loss occurs in 3 of every 1000 live births. It happens often enough that newborn hearing screening is standard protocol in most major hospitals.

The majority of hospitals offer newborn hearing screening as part of their discharge protocol. Infants who fail the screening are then referred on to private clinics or the Childrenâ€™s hospital for diagnostic assessment with an audiologist. Once a hearing loss is identified, a team of experts will work alongside the parents to determine the best course of action. Intervention will commonly include the pediatrician, audiologist, speech-language pathologist, otolaryngologist, deaf education teachers and other educational and medical personnel. For those children whom the hearing loss cannot be medically treated (e.g., a surgical procedure), hearing aids are a common solution. The goal of the medical team is to work with families to find appropriate treatment options for their child based on family goals, desires and expectations. This will be an on-going process throughout their childâ€™s development.

Whether the hearing loss is congenital (genetic) or an acquired hearing loss, the consequences of hearing loss can be devastating if left untreated. Even if the childâ€™s hearing loss is â€œonly mild,â€• stu show that these children can have speech and language delays that are considered to be educationally significant. In other words, the hearing loss is significant enough to have an impact on the childâ€™s development. These children can have emotional difficulties, perform poorly in school and can suffer from personal-social maladjustments.

Many schools provide hearing screening programs for their students as hearing loss can also be acquired later in childhood, whether it is from ear infections, genetics, disease, medicine or trauma, for example. So, even if a child passed a hearing screening at birth, they may not be completely free and clear. With annual hearing screenings, parents can rest assured that their childrenâ€™s hearing health is being monitored.

The good news is that Federal law mandates that all school districts provide specialized education to children who are diagnosed with hearing loss. Now that more of these children are identified early on in life, the hope is that, with appropriate intervention, the adverse consequences of hearing loss will be diminished significantly.

If you feel that your child has a hearing problem, talk to your pediatrician. You know your child best and you are his best advocate. Weâ€™d also be happy to help. If you have questions, feel free to call our office to speak with one of our audiologists. Or, check our website for more information on childhood hearing tests and on language development throughout the childhood years.

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Dr. Kingham joined the Hearing & Balance Lab in 2004. She has a passion for the Deaf community and an interest in neurotology. Dr. Kingham began her career at the University of Washington

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