



CONVERSATIONS IN CARE

A Practical Guide for CHWs and Care Teams Rooted in Trust and Respect

Newborn Hearing Screening

Why It Matters

Welcoming a new baby is an exciting and life-changing time for families. In those first days, babies receive routine screenings to make sure they are healthy and thriving. One of these is the **newborn hearing screening**: a quick and painless test usually done before the baby leaves the hospital.

As a provider, you play an important role in helping parents and caregivers understand what to expect and how to prepare. When families know the purpose of the screening, their baby's results, and the importance of follow-up, if needed, they feel more confident and supported.

Your guidance can make a difference in helping families feel reassured and empowered as they begin their baby's health journey.

This conversation guide aims to support providers in delivering information with compassion, creating a safe and respectful environment, and connecting families to the resources and support they need as they begin to navigate their journey.



Before the conversation

- Create a safe, respectful environment.
- Ask about what the family already knows or believes.
- Acknowledge that some words, beliefs, or traditions may be different, and that it is okay.
- At first, listen more than speak.



Questions

Answers

What is the newborn hearing screening?

A newborn hearing screening is a simple and safe test that checks a baby's hearing shortly after birth. It helps find out if a baby might have hearing loss.

Why should a baby's hearing be tested?

Hearing loss is one of the most common, chronic birth conditions found in children, and testing is the only way to know if a baby has hearing loss.

Hearing plays a critical role in a child's development, especially when it comes to language, communication, and learning. Detecting hearing loss early gives babies the best chance to develop strong speech and language skills and connect with the world around them.



Tip: Babies who receive timely hearing screening, diagnosis, and support are more likely to reach developmental milestones on time.

In some cultures, they don't usually do medical tests unless something is clearly wrong. Why should families do the newborn hearing screening?

The newborn hearing screening is routine for all babies in the U.S. It helps identify concerns early, before signs are obvious, so families can get support right away, if needed.



Tip: Show respect for cultural values. Frame the screening as a way to support the baby's future learning and communication.



Questions

Answers

Is the newborn hearing screening covered by insurance?

Yes. The newborn hearing screen is usually covered by both private insurance and MaineCare. If needed, follow-up testing is also covered, but the follow-up appointments can be more expensive than the initial screening.

Families with private insurance may need to pay part of the cost if they have a deductible, especially a high-deductible plan. It's helpful to encourage families to check with their insurance provider so they understand any costs ahead of time.



Tip: Encourage families to call their insurance provider for clarity. Offer to connect them with hospital billing or financial support services.

What should I know about the hearing screening?

Hearing screening is available for all infants born in Maine.

The screening is a simple process where soft sounds are presented through headphones to the baby while they sleep. The screening is painless and takes only minutes.

Parents and caregivers can be present while the baby is screened. The screening will help determine if a baby needs a full hearing test.



Tip: Use calming language and, if possible, share what the equipment looks like so parents feel comfortable.

Can a family refuse the newborn hearing screening or follow-up?

Yes. Families do have the right to refuse both the newborn hearing screening and any follow-up testing.

If they choose to refuse, the hospital will ask them to sign a form (called a refusal form) that documents their decision. There are no legal consequences for refusing.



Tip: Respect their decision, but gently explain why early screening is important for language and learning. Encourage families to keep information in case they change their mind later.



Questions

Answers

What if a baby does not pass their first hearing screening?

If a baby does not pass the first hearing screening, then the baby and family will need to see an audiologist for a full hearing test as soon as possible. This is important and should not be ignored or put off.

Families should work with healthcare providers to get a referral to an audiologist for a follow-up appointment.



Tip: Reassure families that the test is only a first step. Emphasize that follow-up is important to be sure.

What are the possible screening results, and what do they mean?

Pass:

- Your baby passed the hearing screening.
- Monitor speech and language milestones as hearing loss can develop later in childhood.

Pass with risk factor(s):

- Your baby passed but has a risk factor(s).
- Talk to your healthcare provider as more testing may be needed to monitor speech and language milestones.

Refer:

- Your baby did not pass and needs more testing by an audiologist (a hearing professional).
- This does not necessarily mean that there is hearing loss, but follow-up testing will help you learn how your baby hears.

We found out our baby may have hearing loss. What happens now?

It's normal to feel many emotions, confusion, fear, or even relief. You are not alone.

The next step is to meet with specialists who can confirm results and talk about support options.



Tip: Listen with empathy. Provide resources for early intervention and connect families with peer support groups if available.

Note: These questions and responses were gathered from community members and developed with their voices and cultural insight. For more information or resources, visit MCD's Strengthening Patient Care webpage: mcd.org/technical-assistance-training/strengthening-patient-care