

The Importance of Hearing Testing

Optimal hearing is essential for children to learn language, which is needed for a variety of communication activities, including listening to speech and learning to speak, read and write. Language development is necessary for children to become independent adults. Therefore, hearing loss can have a great impact on language development. To maximize communication ability, people of all ages should visit a physician and an audiologist when hearing loss is suspected.

Some children are born with hearing loss. Sometimes hearing loss is temporary, and sometimes it is permanent. In many cases, the hearing loss is associated with other medical conditions.

Examples of conditions that are associated with hearing loss may include low birth weight (less than 3.3 lbs.), syndromes associated with hearing loss, and anatomical head and face anomalies.^{1,2} Some children are also born with systemic problems associated with hearing loss, such as jaundice, rubella, cytomegalovirus and bacterial meningitis.

These children are more at risk of hearing loss than others without these conditions. Children at risk need to receive a hearing evaluation consistent with their physicians' evaluation and treatment plans.

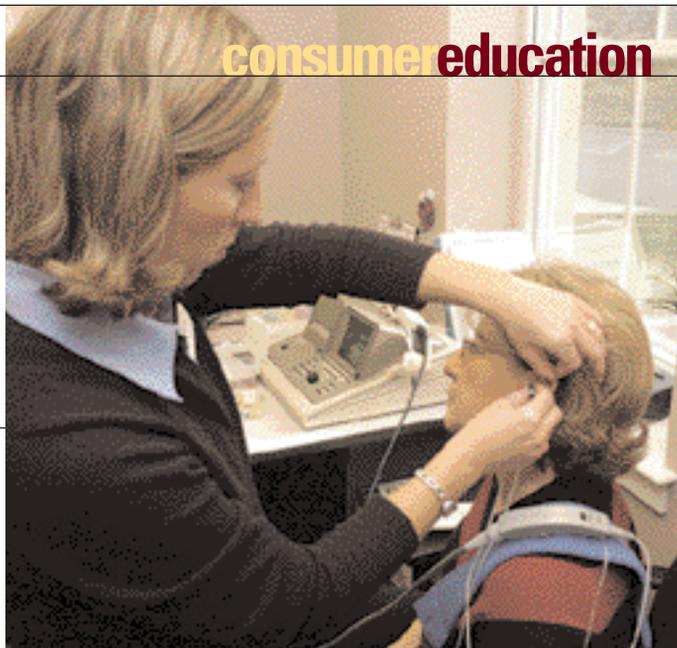
Hearing Loss in Children

Hearing loss may occur at any age. Therefore, it is advised that a child's hearing should be screened whenever signs of hearing loss occur. Signs may include not responding to or inconsistently responding to important sounds.

Complaints from the child that his ear feels painful are indicators that a physician and audiologist need to be contacted for an assessment of potential ear/hearing problems.

Hearing testing for children can occur at any age. Pediatricians frequently ask parents to report any problems noted with hearing. Physicians and audiologists begin by looking into a person's ears. Pediatricians frequently have a nurse screen a child's hearing.

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HEARING PROBLEM? When hearing loss is suspected, an audiologist can address your concerns.

Special test methods are used with infants and young children. Some tests with very young children require little or no active participation by the patient, making them ideal for infants and toddlers. Some tests employ game-like conditions with the child actively participating.

Need for Testing in Adults

Adults are at risk for hearing loss at any age. Therefore, it is advised that any ear pain or inability to hear sounds that others normally hear should alert them that they should get tested. An examination by a physician and hearing tests by an audiologist reveal medically and surgically treatable problems, as well as problems that require habilitation/rehabilitation and assistive listening devices such as amplification.

Testing and the Audiologist

A hearing screening conducted by a person other than an audiologist should be interpreted with caution. Most states require that the person who tests hearing be licensed as an audiologist. Audiologists measure and assess hearing ability in all ages of people. Location of testing also is a key consideration. For example, the environment of a quality testing booth will contribute to testing success and, ultimately, patient satisfaction.

Children and adults must be aware that hearing loss may occur at any time in their lives. It is equally important to know that hearing loss is readily diagnosed and that there are many different ways to help people with hearing loss. Contact your family physician or audiologist for diagnosis and treatment of suspected hearing problems.

REFERENCES:

1. University of Iowa Center for Disabilities and Development: www.vh.org/pediatric/provider/pediatrics/infantheating
2. Bobby R. Alford Department of Otorhinolaryngology and Communicative Sciences: www.bcm.edu/oto/otologyprimer/hl/childhoodhl.html

moreinfo

Boys Town National Research Hospital

www.boystownhospital.org/parents/info/testing.asp

Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh

www.chp.edu/greystone/ent/hslhub.php

The Gerontology Center at The Pennsylvania State University

<http://geron.psu.edu/outreach/healths.html>