

HEARING SCREENING PROGRAM FOR NICU BABIES

By Dianne I. Maroney

The NICU is typically a very noisy place. Although medical professionals attempt to diminish the noise around him, your infant will be exposed to a variety of sounds that may be harmful to his hearing. Being in the NICU also brings other risk factors that predispose infants to possible hearing loss. If your infant has had a bacterial infection, was on a ventilator for more than ten days, had a bilirubin level above 20, weighed less than 1500 grams at birth, or has a family history of hearing loss, he has a higher risk for future hearing problems.

The US Department of Health and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that all infants in the NICU have a hearing screening test done before discharge. Due to his increased risk, your infant will need to be watched carefully once he is home (even if he passed his hearing test in the hospital). Your baby's physician should do a hearing screening at each visit doctor's visit and if there is any question of hearing loss, your baby should be referred to an audiologist for further testing. Because hearing is critical to a child's language which begins developing in the first few months of life, it is important to discover and treat any hearing loss as early as possible. Ask your doctor about the early signs of hearing loss and always trust your instincts.

For more information you can contact the American Academy of Audiology at (800) AAA-2336 or www.audiology.org.