

Hearing loss in children

Hearing is important for your child's social and emotional growth. The ability to hear well supports your child as they learn to talk and eventually to read and write. It is important to have your child's hearing tested if you have concerns that they are not hearing well or talking clearly.

What can I do if I think my child has problems hearing?

Hearing loss can be hard to detect at home. A mild degree of hearing loss is sometimes mistaken for other concerns, and it may cause a child to appear distracted or withdrawn.

Have your child's hearing tested by an audiologist if you have concerns, even if your child has previously had a normal hearing test. Contact your local public health hearing clinic or your family health care provider to find out more about making a referral.

See your health care provider right away if your child has any of the following:

- Ear discharge (fluid draining from ear)
- Bad smell from the ear canal
- Reddened skin around the ear
- An object in the ear canal
- An injury to the ear

Can hearing change?

Yes, hearing can change at any age. These changes in hearing can be either temporary or permanent. Most hearing loss that occurs in young children after birth is temporary and medically treatable.

What can affect my child's hearing?

Common causes of temporary hearing loss in children include:

- Fluid in the middle ear
- Wax build-up that blocks the ear canal

Common causes of permanent hearing loss in children include:

- Genetic hearing loss, even if there is no one else in the family with hearing loss
- Childhood illnesses such as meningitis, measles, mumps or encephalitis
- Some infections present at birth such as congenital cytomegalovirus (cCMV)
- Certain syndromes, like Down syndrome, Pendred and Alport
- Low birth weight – less than 1,200 grams (2.65 pounds)
- Very high bilirubin levels at birth that need an exchange transfusion
- Excessive or prolonged noise exposure without use of ear protection

What can I do to protect my child's hearing?

Often hearing loss is not preventable. However, you can help protect your child's hearing by having them wear hearing protection in noisy environments such as at fireworks and sporting events, and by keeping children away from harmful substances such as cigarette smoke. For more information on how second-hand smoke can harm babies and children, visit [HealthLinkBC File #30a The harmful effects of second-hand tobacco smoke and vapour](#).

Getting your child immunized helps prevent illnesses that can cause permanent hearing loss.

What are the speech and spoken language milestones for my child's age group?

Birth to 3 months old

- Startles or cries at loud sounds
- Becomes quiet or smiles when spoken to
- Makes cooing sounds

4 to 6 months old

- Turns head in direction of sounds
- Pays attention to social games (for example "Where's baby?"), singing and rhymes
- Babbles using a variety of speech-like sounds and starts imitating
- Becomes frightened by loud voices or noises
- Responds to a "no" and changes in tone of voice

7 to 12 months old

- Turns and looks in the direction of sounds
- Recognizes words for common items such as "cup," "juice" or "shoe"
- Begins to respond to requests such as "come here" or "do you want more?"
- Imitates many different speech sounds
- Starts saying first words such as "mama" and "dada"

1 to 2 years old

- Points to body parts when asked
- Follows simple commands
- Says more words every month
- Starts putting 2 words together

2 to 3 years old

- Follows 2 requests at a time, such as "get the toy" and "put it on the chair"
- Listens to stories for a longer period of time
- Uses 2- to 3-word sentences
- Is understood by people who are around them most of the time

For more information

For information on hearing tests or hearing loss, visit the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #71b Hearing tests for infants and children](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #71c Hearing loss in adults](#)

For more information on childhood immunization, visit the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #50a Your baby's immune system and vaccines](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #50b The benefits of immunizing your child](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #50c Childhood vaccines are safe](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #50d Childhood vaccines: What is in the vaccines and why](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #50e A better immunization experience for your child](#)

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/health-library/healthlinkbc-files or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C., visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.