

Physicians Role in the Follow-Up of Newborn Screening

Significant hearing loss is one of the most common major abnormalities present at birth and if undetected will impede speech, language and cognitive development. Significant bilateral hearing loss is present in about 1 to 3 per 1000 newborn infants in the well baby nursery. Screening by high risk registry alone can only identify about 50% of newborns with significant congenital hearing loss. Reliance on physician observation and/or parental recognition has not been successful in the past in detecting significant hearing loss in the first year of life. (AAP-policy)

Research has shown that identifying hearing loss early (before three months) and beginning intervention services before six months will improve outcomes for these children. This is true for all children with hearing loss, including children with mild hearing loss, unilateral hearing loss and those with greater degrees of hearing loss. By the time they enter first grade, children identified no later than 6 months of age are 1-2 years ahead of their later identified peers in language, cognitive, and social skills.

Research on brain development indicates that the critical time for learning language is from birth to three years of age. Without early identification of hearing loss and subsequent intervention, children are at risk of missing the opportunity for communication and socialization development during early life experiences.