

Information about Newborn Hearing Tests (2:09)

CNN

Female Narrator: For many, there's no greater joy than bringing a baby into the world. And for most parents, as long as their baby is healthy, it doesn't matter if it's a boy or a girl. But up to three out of every 1,000 babies are born deaf or hard of hearing, and that's why 36 states now require hospitals to test the hearing of all newborns.

(0:21)

Dr. Robert Wiskind, Pediatrician: The reason for that is even though you'd think it would be easy to determine whether a child can hear or not, prior to the era of doing these routine testings, it was often 12 to 18 months of age before we were able to identify these children with profound hearing loss. And the later you figure out that they have a hearing problem, the harder it is to fix it; they've lost so much in language, it's hard for them to get back.

(0:44)

Female narrator: From the day they're born, babies react to the sounds around them. Over time, by listening to voices, they learn speech and language, which aid in cognitive development.

(0:53)

Dr. Robert Wiskind, Pediatrician: You can't learn to talk unless you hear well. And we know that a lot of language development occurs during those first 18 months to two years of life, so we want to make sure that babies can hear. And the evidence shows that if they do have a hearing problem, and you're able to correct it, then they have normal or close to normal language development. But if you're delayed in correcting it or recognizing it, then it takes longer for their language to catch up, and they might not catch up.

(1:20)

Female narrator: The test is usually given around 24 hours after birth. It takes just a few minutes, is painless, and can be done in the mother's room while the baby sleeps. The most common test is called an otoacoustic emissions test. A tiny earphone with a microphone in it is inserted in the baby's ear and sends a sound. If a baby hears normally, an echo is sent back measured by the microphone and recorded. If no echo is detected, then further tests may be done to see if there's a problem with the middle or inner ear such as blockage, fluid, or damage. The goal is identify the more than 6,000 babies sent home each year with undetected hearing problems, since early detection can make a world of difference.

Dr. Robert Wiskind, Pediatrician: Significant hearing problems are not common in newborns, but for that newborn it is very significant.

Holly Firfer, CNN, Atlanta