

EMBARGOED UNTIL: 00:01hrs; Wednesday 16 May, 2012

Thousands of deaf children benefiting as screening hit five million milestone

Nearly 9,000 children with hearing impairment have better chances of success at school and their parents are better prepared to support them thanks to the introduction of an NHS programme to detect hearing problems in the first days of a baby's life. Today (Wednesday 16 May, 2012) marks the five millionth baby in England to be screened by the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme (NHSP) since the programme began in 2001.

Any delay in identifying a hearing impairment has a huge impact on a child's communication and language development, which in turn can adversely affect their social interaction and educational development with consequent longer-term risk to mental health and quality of life. But long-term UK and international research* has shown that identifying deafness in babies and providing comprehensive support and treatment leads to these children communication skills developing at the same rate as their hearing peers.

Today 95 per cent of babies identified by the screening programme have full diagnostic tests to identify their individual needs by the time they are five weeks old. High quality early support is vital given that around 90 per cent of these babies are born into families with no experience, or history, of childhood deafness. Every child has different needs and the support offered to meet them interventions may include the fitting of hearing aids, or the provision of cochlear implants, and skilled help for the whole family to help them develop their child's language and communication develop appropriately, either through speech or through sign.

Professor Adrian Davis, director of the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme (NHSP), said: ""Starting well' is what we want for all our children. Good communication is fundamental to starting well and for the 5m children screened in England, the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme has been focused on obtaining the best communication outcomes for them. It is acknowledged as world leading because it has delivered an integrated screening, diagnostic and support programme that is enthusiastically peer reviewed, driven by a concern to keep families engaged at all times."

Secretary of State for Health Andrew Lansley said:

"Thanks to the NHS Newborn Hearing Screening Programme, babies born with a hearing impairment can now be identified much earlier. This allows babies with hearing problems to receive the support they need earlier to give them the best possible start in life."

Susan Daniels, Chief Executive of the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) said: "We are very proud of the role we played in securing routine screening for newborns, after decades of campaigning. If hearing loss is identified at birth, deaf children have every chance of achieving as

well as other children, and their parents can get the support they need to be confident about bringing up a deaf child.

"Without the right support, deaf children are vulnerable to low achievement, poor self-esteem, bullying and isolation. This is why they need continuous, comprehensive support that's tailored to their needs, starting right from birth."

Karen Taylor, President of the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf and Headteacher of Virtual School Sensory Support in Norfolk, said: "Newborn hearing screening enables services to work in partnership with families empowering them to make informed choices at a critical time in the development of their baby's communication skills. This has significantly changed the way services work as early intervention enables many deaf children to acquire age appropriate language skills as they enter school and gives them the opportunity to attend their local mainstream provision."

There are approximately 900 children born a year in the UK with significant permanent hearing impairment. Before the introduction of the NHSP, about 400 of these children would have been missed by 1½ years of age, and about 200 still undiagnosed by 3½ years of age.

The NHSP screens around 13,000 babies each week; about 98 per cent of those born in England, either in the hospital maternity ward or by a health visitor in the community. The test involves placing a small soft tipped earpiece in the outer part of the baby's ear and playing clicking sounds. When an ear receives sound, the inner part, known as the cochlea, usually produces an echo, which is picked up by the screening equipment. The process only takes a few minutes and is not painful or uncomfortable for the baby.

Between one and two babies in every 1,000 are born with a hearing loss in one or both ears. Even if a baby is given a clear response at the hearing screening test, it is still a good idea to monitor their hearing, as children can develop a hearing loss as they grow older.

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Parent and expert case studies and spokespeople are available. For more information please call the NHS Screening press office on (020) 74007390 or email NHSscreeningpressoffice@hanovercomms.com

Notes to editors

- *Yoshinaga-Itano C, Sedey AL, Coulter DK, Mehl AL; Language of early- and later-identified children with hearing loss."; <u>Pediatrics.</u> 1998 Nov;102(5):1161-71
 - Australian Longitudinal Outcomes of Children with Hearing Impairment study: http://www.phonakpro.com/com/b2b/en/events/proceedings/pediatric conference stuttgart2010.html

Moeller, MP (2000) Early intervention and Language Development in Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Paediatrics Vol 106' sept 2000

- Kennedy C et al (2006) Language Ability after Early Detection of Permanent Childhood Hearing Impairment New England Journal of Medicine 2006.
- 2. The UK National Screening Committee The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) is chaired by the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland and advises Ministers and the NHS in all four UK countries about all aspects of screening policy and supports implementation. Using research evidence, pilot programmes and economic evaluation, it assesses the evidence for programmes against a set of internationally recognised criteria. Assessing programmes in this way is intended to ensure that they do more good than harm at a reasonable cost. The UK NSC's policy review process is described at http://www.screening.nhs.uk/policyreview and the criteria used to assess evidence are available at http://www.screening.nhs.uk/criteria.

3.	NDCS is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people: www.ndcs.org.uk . For more information on childhood deafness parents can contact the NDCS Freephone Helpline on 0808 800 8880 (voice and text), email helpline@ndcs.org.uk , or chat online at www.ndcs.org.uk/livechat .