



## Neonatal intensive care unit (NNU) or special care baby unit (SCBU)

### YOUR BABY'S HEARING SCREEN – INFORMATION FOR THOSE WITH PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

This leaflet provides information about newborn hearing screening for babies who are in, or who have been in, neonatal intensive care units (NNU), or special care baby units (SCBU).

Your baby will be offered a newborn hearing screening test. This quick and simple test is offered to all newborn babies who are born in, reside, or who move into, Northern Ireland aged up to 182 days.

#### Purpose of newborn hearing screening

The aim of the programme is to identify babies born with a permanent childhood hearing impairment (PCHI) early, to allow timely intervention and improved outcomes. Approximately 1 in every 100 babies, who spend more than 48 hours in NNU/SCBU, is born with a hearing loss in both ears.

#### Participation in newborn hearing screening

This screening test is recommended for your baby. Finding hearing loss (in one or both ears) early is important for your baby's development.

#### When and where will the screening take place?

The screening test will usually be done before your baby leaves hospital. If this does not happen, an appointment will be arranged for you.

## What do the screening tests involve?

The screening test is painless and is usually done while the baby is sleeping. A trained hearing screener carries out the screening tests. There are two parts to the screen for babies who have spent over 48 hours in a neonatal or special care baby unit:

### 1. The Automated Otoacoustic Emission (AOAE) Test

The screener will place a small soft tipped ear piece in the outer part of your baby's ear which sends clicking sounds into the ear. When the inner part of the ear receives a sound, it usually produces a response. Using a computer, the screener can see how your baby's ear responds to sound. This is called the automated otoacoustic emission (AOAE) test.

### 2. The Automated Auditory Brainstem Response (AABR) Test

This test involves three small sensors being placed on your baby's head. Headphones are put over your baby's ears and a series of clicking sounds are played. A computer measures how well your baby's ears respond to the sounds. This test takes longer than the AOAE test and is carried out while your baby is sleeping. Both screening tests are simple, safe and painless.

You may be able to stay with your baby during the screening tests. (If your baby is in a neonatal intensive care unit, or special care baby unit and you are not always able to visit in the daytime, *and you have provided consent for your baby to participate*, the screening may be done in your absence).

## When will I receive the results?

The results will be given to you by the screener as soon as the screening test is complete.

## What do the results mean?

***If the screening tests show a clear response from both of your baby's ears:***

This means that your baby is unlikely to have a hearing loss. Your baby's Personal Child Health Record (PCHR, or 'red book') contains

a 'checklist' which gives advice about the sounds your baby should react to and the types of sounds that they should make as they grow older. However, if you have any concerns regarding your baby's hearing, **at any age**, you should discuss them with your health visitor or GP. This is important as hearing loss can occur at any age.

***If the screen does not show a clear response from one or both ears:***

If the screen does not show clear responses from one or both ears this does not necessarily mean that your baby has a hearing loss. Some common reasons for not having a clear response include:

- Baby was unsettled at the time of the test;
- There was background noise at the time of the test;
- Fluid or a temporary blockage in the ear

If the screener does not get a clear response in both ears you will be given an appointment to bring your baby to the audiology clinic where further tests will be carried out to measure your baby's hearing. You will be given a leaflet explaining what this involves.

### **What is the likelihood of my baby having a hearing loss?**

Approximately 1 in every 100 babies who have spent more than 48 hours in a neonatal or special care baby unit have a hearing loss. Most babies will record clear responses at the screening test and any further tests carried out by the audiologist. Finding out that your baby has a hearing loss early means that you and your baby will get advice and support as soon as possible.

### **Targeted follow-up**

Any baby who has particular risk factors, identified at the time of newborn hearing screening, will be offered a follow-up audiology appointment when baby is approximately 8 months old.

### **Processing your baby's information**

Information about your baby's newborn hearing screen results are recorded in his/her PCHR 'red book', and on the regional

Smart4Hearing (S4H) system. We share your baby's newborn hearing screening results with staff who provide newborn hearing screening and with audiology services. To help us provide the best care and service for you and your baby, we may need to share your information with other healthcare bodies such as your GP, your Health Visitor, the Health and Social Care Board (to inform service development), and other relevant professionals.

A dedicated privacy notice has been developed to describe how personal information will be processed within the S4H system and this is available to view/download at:

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/directorate-public-health/service-development-and-screening/newborn-screening>

Other translations of this leaflet are available to view/download at:

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/newborn-hearing-screening-english-and-translations>

Contact details for your local newborn hearing screening office:

- Northern Health and Social Care Trust **028 25 635674**
- Southern Health and Social Care Trust **028 38 562125**
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust **028 90 564748**
- Western Health and Social Care Trust **028 71 611452**
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust **02890 633558**

Find more information on NI Direct –

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/newborn-screening>  
or Gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/topic/population-screening-programmes/newborn-hearing>

You can also contact the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) freephone helpline on 0808 800 8880 (voice and text)

<https://www.ndcs.org.uk/>

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