

Guidance

Newborn hearing screening: programme overview

This overview of the NHS newborn hearing screening programme (NHSP) explains how a baby's hearing is tested, and the equipment used for the tests.

From:

NHS England (</government/organisations/nhs-england>)

Published

1 April 2013

Last updated

8 July 2024 —

Applies to England

Contents

- Target population
- Condition screened for
- Newborn hearing screening tests
- Evidence base
- Requests for screening data and research
- Commissioning
- Quality assurance
- Workforce: education and training
- Keep up to date

- Contact the screening team

Information for the public about newborn hearing screening screening is available on the [NHS website](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/newborn-hearing-test/) (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/newborn-hearing-test/>).

It is the choice of an individual, with parental responsibility for the baby, whether or not their baby has screening.

The NHS is committed to [reducing inequalities and variation in screening participation](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/nhs-population-screening-access-for-all) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/nhs-population-screening-access-for-all>) to help make sure everyone has fair and equal access to screening services.

NHS England provides information about [data use and patient confidentiality in population screening programmes](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/patient-confidentiality-in-nhs-population-screening-programmes) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/patient-confidentiality-in-nhs-population-screening-programmes>). [Operational guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/newborn-hearing-screening-programme-nhsp-operational-guidance) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/newborn-hearing-screening-programme-nhsp-operational-guidance>) is available to support providers of newborn hearing screening services in England.

Target population

Newborn hearing screening is offered to all babies in England, ideally within the first 4 to 5 weeks after they are born.

The test can be done for babies up to the age of 3 months.

Condition screened for

Newborn hearing screening aims to identify permanent moderate, severe and profound deafness and hearing impairment in newborn babies.

Finding out early can give these babies a better chance of developing language, speech, and communication skills.

Newborn hearing screening tests

[Screening tests for you and your baby](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/screening-tests-for-you-and-your-baby) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/screening-tests-for-you-and-your-baby>) explains the newborn hearing screening tests.

Newborn hearing screening always involves the automated otoacoustic emission (AOAE) test. Some babies also need a second test, the automated auditory

brainstem response (AABR) test.

The [Newborn hearing screening: care pathways](#)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/newborn-hearing-screening-care-pathways>) describe when those tests are performed for well babies and babies in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs).

The AOAE test involves placing a small soft-tipped earpiece in the baby's ear, after which gentle clicking sounds are played. The ear response is picked up by the screening equipment. The AOAE test takes just a few minutes.

The AABR test involves placing 3 small sensors on the baby's forehead, nape of neck and shoulder. Soft headphones are placed over the baby's ears and gentle clicking sounds are played. The AABR test takes between 5 and 15 minutes.

If the screening test results do not show a clear response in one or both of the baby's ears, a referral for [audiological assessment](#)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/newborn-hearing-screening-first-visit-to-the-audiology-clinic>) is made within 4 weeks.

Evidence base

Newborn hearing screening is one of 11 [NHS national population screening programmes](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-explained>) available in England.

The [UK National Screening Committee](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-national-screening-committee-uk-nsa>) (UK NSC) makes [recommendations](#) (<https://legacyscreening.phe.org.uk/screening-recommendations.php>) to ministers in the 4 UK countries on all aspects of population screening. It ensures that screening provides more benefit than harm, at a reasonable cost to the NHS.

Recommendations are based on [internationally recognised criteria](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-review-criteria-national-screening-programmes>) and a rigorous [evidence review process](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nsa-evidence-review-process>).

Read the [UK NSC recommendation on newborn hearing screening](#) (<https://legacyscreening.phe.org.uk/hearing-newborn>).

NHS England collects [routine data](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/newborn-hearing-screening-standards-data-report-april-2017-to-march-2018>) to monitor the uptake of newborn hearing screening.

Requests for screening data and research

There are terms of reference for NHS population screening programme [research advisory committees](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-data-requests-and-research) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-data-requests-and-research>).

Commissioning

All newborn hearing screening commissioners must follow the [service specification](https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/public-health-national-service-specifications/) (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/public-health-national-service-specifications/>) and use the [supporting documents](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/newborn-hearing-screening-supporting-publications) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/newborn-hearing-screening-supporting-publications>) to ensure a fit for purpose programme is set up and meets the required standards.

Quality assurance

The role of the [screening quality assurance service \(SQAS\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-quality-assurance) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-quality-assurance>) is to:

- assess the quality of local screening programmes
- monitor compliance with standards
- support services with improving quality
- undertake [regional level quality assurance visits](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-population-screening-regional-quality-assurance-teams-in-england) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-population-screening-regional-quality-assurance-teams-in-england>)

The programme specific operating model

[The programme specific operating model](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/antenatal-and-newborn-screening-quality-assurance-procedures) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/antenatal-and-newborn-screening-quality-assurance-procedures>) for quality assurance of the antenatal and newborn screening programmes should be read in conjunction with the [operating model for PHE screening quality assurance service](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/screening-quality-assurance-service-operating-model) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/screening-quality-assurance-service-operating-model>) and the relevant [programme standards](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/newborn-hearing-screening-programme-quality-standards) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/newborn-hearing-screening-programme-quality-standards>).

Workforce: education and training

[Education and training resources](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/newborn-hearing-screening-programme-nhsp-operational-guidance/2-education-and-training) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/newborn-hearing-screening-programme-nhsp-operational-guidance/2-education-and-training>) are available for healthcare professionals working in newborn hearing screening.

There are also more [general resources](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-education-and-training) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-education-and-training>) about population screening to support screening professionals in their initial training and continuing professional development

Keep up to date

Keep up to date with what is new in the programme, including the latest guidance and good practice.

You can [register to get updates](#)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/population-screening-programmes-nhsp>) on the NHS newborn hearing screening programme direct to your inbox. Follow the instructions to get emails about the pages you are interested in.

Contact the screening team

NHS England screening
Wellington House
133-155 Waterloo Road
London
SE1 8UG

Read our [leaflet on screening tests for you and your baby and find out how to request alternative formats](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/screening-tests-for-you-and-your-baby>) on GOV.UK.

We cannot help with media enquiries or access screening results.

Published 1 April 2013

Last updated 8 July 2024 [+ show all updates](#)