

# Alberta's EHDI Program

## Frequently Asked Questions

March 2021

### What is the EHDI Program?

Alberta's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program is a provincial population-based screening program provided by AHS. The program identifies permanent hearing loss as early as possible in an infant's life. This ensures that follow-up and support can be provided sooner to improve language, learning and developmental outcomes for infants.

The EHDI Program's services include:

- **Screening** infants for hearing loss no later than *1 month of age*
- **Diagnosing** permanent hearing loss no later than *3 months of age*
- Ensuring access to **intervention** no later than *6 months of age*

### What is the target condition?

The EHDI Program targets permanent congenital hearing loss (PCHL) in one (unilateral) or both (bilateral) ears. The hearing loss may be sensorineural (including auditory neuropathy spectrum disorder), conductive or mixed in nature.

PCHL is one of the most common congenital conditions found in newborns. Each year, it affects between 109 and 163 infants in Alberta. Over half of all infants identified with PCHL are healthy and have no family history.

### Why is hearing screening important?

Without screening, there are no obvious signs early on to tell if an infant has hearing loss and the average age of diagnosis is 24 months. Mild to moderate losses often go undiagnosed until school age. When found early, infants and families are able to access follow-up and support sooner to prevent delays.

### Who is eligible?

All infants born in Alberta or born to parents living in Alberta are eligible for hearing screening within 90 days of birth. However, it's best for infants to be screened within 30 days of birth.

Infants born with bilateral aural atresia or presenting with meningitis are not eligible for screening. These infants are referred directly to audiology services, by the EHDI Program, for a diagnostic Auditory Brainstem Response (ABR) assessment.

### Where is the EHDI Program offered?

Newborn hearing screening is offered throughout the province, free of charge, at most hospitals with over 200 births per year and targeted community sites. Diagnostic ABR hearing assessments are also available at eight audiology sites throughout the province. A list of sites currently offering hearing screening is available via the service listing on [AHS.ca/ehdi](https://www.alberta.ca/ehdi).

### What if an infant wasn't screened before hospital discharge, or was born at a site where screening is not offered?

These infants can receive their hearing screening at a community-based screening site. Each AHS zone has a procedure in place to ensure that infants who missed their hearing screening in the hospital get screened. Depending on the zone, a referral will be made or parents will receive information on how to book an appointment at a community-based screening site.

### What are the possible hearing screening outcomes?

There are three possible outcomes:

- **Pass:** Permanent hearing loss wasn't found, and the infant is hearing well on the day of the screening. Parents should monitor their infant's speech-language development using the checklist on the parent handouts.
- **Pass with risk factors:** Permanent hearing loss wasn't found, and the infant is hearing well on the day of the screening. However, the infant has risk factors that may increase the chance of developing hearing loss at a later time. The infant will be referred *by the EHDI Program* for a follow-up hearing test in *6 to 8 months*. Parents should monitor their infant's speech-language development using the checklist on the parent handouts.
- **Refer:** The infant didn't pass the hearing screening and will be referred *by the EHDI Program* for a diagnostic Auditory Brainstem Response (ABR) assessment. This test is used to confirm or rule out permanent hearing loss.

### What if an infant is older than 90 days and has not been screened?

If a parent is concerned about their infant's hearing after 90 days of birth, a referral should be made to the nearest AHS or Covenant Health audiology service.

### What is my role as a health care provider?

Health care providers are well positioned to communicate about the importance of early hearing screening and PCHL identification. In this way, you can support Alberta's success in identifying hearing loss early and improving the speech-language and overall developmental outcomes of infants with PCHL.

- Share information with parents before and after the birth of their infant about the importance of hearing screening. Reassure them that the screening and diagnostic tests are safe and will not hurt their infant.
- Encourage expectant and new parents to have their infant's hearing screened.
- When an infant does not pass the screening, remind parents of the importance of attending the follow-up diagnostic ABR assessment.

### Where can I access hearing screening results?

Results are not available online at this time. You will need to speak with parents to identify their infant's screening outcome. It is anticipated that results will be available via Connect Care in the coming years.

---

Visit [AHS.ca/ehdi](https://www.aHS.ca/ehdi) and click on "Information for Health Professionals" to learn more about Alberta's EHDI Program.