



Why should an audiologist test my child's hearing?

By: [Selvarani Moodley, Audiologist and HiHopes Parent advisor](#)

The standard in the developed world is hearing screening at birth. All children have their hearing screened before they leave the hospital. A hearing screen involves placing a small probe in the child's ear and waiting for the machine to give a pass (all clear) or refer (there might be some difficulties with the ear and/or hearing) response. The difficulty with hearing screening in a developing country such as South Africa is twofold:

- 1) Babies are discharged from the hospital sometimes within a few hours after birth, and at that period the ear might still have vernix (birth fluids) that will affect the results of the screening.
- 2) Screening is not part of legislation. Parents are given the option of having their child's hearing screened (often without an explanation of the prevalence of hearing loss and the importance of early identification) and is a process which parents have to pay for.

So, why is hearing screening so important?

- 1) 50% of hearing loss is of unknown cause with no risk factors, meaning that any child (regardless of family history) could have a hearing loss.
- 2) Hearing loss is "silent", there are no obvious signs that the child has a hearing loss until the child fails to develop speech appropriately.
- 3) Early identification, with appropriate individualised, family-centred intervention will provide the child with opportunities for typical development.

Early identification and intervention is key to unlocking the potential of the child with a hearing loss.