

## identifying disabilities

# Virginia's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (VEHDI) Program

By Pat Dewey, M. Ed.

Virginia Department of Health, Division of Child and Adolescent Health

Hearing loss is the most common birth defect in the nation according to the National Center for Hearing Management at Utah State University. In Virginia, as many as 500 babies born each year are diagnosed with hearing loss. It is very important that parents and primary health care providers understand the importance of newborn hearing screening and the need for continued monitoring of infant hearing development. Parents are best qualified to watch their child's hearing development and look for the signs of potential problems, while health care providers play a critical role in ensuring that all infants who need follow-up services receive them.

Since July 1, 2000, Virginia law has required that all hospitals with newborn nurseries test the hearing of all newborns prior to discharge. Once an infant receives a hearing screening, hospitals are required to inform the parents and the child's primary health care provider about the infant's screening results and/or risk status for hearing loss and to provide the recommendations for follow-up services. Hospitals also must report the results of newborn hearing screening to the Virginia Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (VEHDI) Program at the Virginia Department of Health.

The VEHDI Program collects the results of the hearing screening and follow-up testing and contacts parents to ensure that they receive all the information necessary to seek timely and appropriate follow-up services. The program also works with physicians and other primary health care providers to ensure they receive notification of an infant's status, that they will provide timely referrals for further testing and that they have access to the latest information regarding the medical management of children with hearing loss. Additionally, the VEHDI Program works with

audiologists, offers training and technical assistance to hospitals, monitors hospitals' referral rates and reviews and evaluates the overall hearing screening tracking and reporting system in Virginia.

If left undetected, significant hearing loss interferes with speech, language and cognitive development. Early identification of hearing loss is crucial because children who receive intervention services before the age of six months usually stay on track with their peers for language development. According to Boys Town National Research Hospital, there are two main goals of early intervention:

- to help the baby who is deaf or hard of hearing learn to communicate, use any available hearing, and interact socially. *All children learn skills best at certain ages. During these "sensitive periods," your baby's brain is ready to learn. If these opportunities for learning are missed, it will be more difficult to learn the skills later on.*

- to help your baby become a fully participating member of the family. *Everyone in the family is important to your baby's development, especially in developing language and social skills. For example, you'll want your baby to know what your family talks about at mealtime and what big brother and sister did at school. And, like all other young children, you'll want your baby to understand where you're going when you get into the car, when it's time to go to bed and when it's time to play, who Barney and Big Bird are and what they talk about.*

Some children will have mild or moderate hearing loss that can get progressively worse or can develop hearing loss later. Therefore, even if their child

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passes the newborn hearing screening, parents should continually check for the signs that their baby is able to hear. Through personal observation and by working

with their primary medical care provider to follow up on their child's hearing health, parents will ensure that their child has the best opportunity for language development.

Families needing referrals for hearing evaluations, hearing aids, early intervention services or general information about services needed for children who are deaf or hard of hearing may contact the VEHDI Program at 804-864-7718 or 866-493-1090 (toll free). TTY users dial 711 for Virginia Relay.

The VEHDI Program also offers parents an opportunity to talk with other parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Parents who make up the Hear and Now group make themselves available by phone to discuss issues, answer questions, or just listen.

The VEHDI Program recently established the Virginia Hearing Aid Loan Bank (VHALB) using funds from a four-year, federal Health Resources and Services Administration/Maternal and Child Health grant. Select digital/programmable hearing aids and FM systems are available for loan to children with hearing loss who are under the age of 18. The loan period is six months; application may be submitted to extend the loan for an additional six-month period. All children under the age of 18 with hearing loss are eligible, regardless of income status. This bank will enable a child to be fitted with amplification within weeks of diagnosis, thereby increasing the benefits of early identification while allowing the family time to pursue funding for permanent devices through insurance or other means.

The Blue Ridge Care Connection for Children center, located in Charlottesville, manages the VHALB for the VEHDI Program. The plan includes a minimum one-time payment to the child's audiologist for handling and fitting the loaner instrument(s). Families and audiologists may submit applications to the VHALB in care of Lisa Powley, Blue Ridge Care Connection for Children, P. O. Box 800421, Charlottesville, VA 22908. Powley also can be reached at 434-924-0222 or 866-596-9367 toll free. Application forms and information are available on the VDH Web site: [www.vahealth.org/hearing/newunhs.htm](http://www.vahealth.org/hearing/newunhs.htm) ■

*Pat Dewey is the program manager for the Virginia Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program at the Virginia Department of Health and has been an advocate for children for over 30 years.*

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The following Web sites can be a source of additional information about childhood hearing loss. In addition, please see the resource section beginning on page 76.

• **Boys Town National Research Hospital**

*Web site from Boys Town National Research Hospital for parents of infants identified through newborn hearing screening.*

[www.babyhearing.org](http://www.babyhearing.org)

• **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention**

*Describes CDC efforts in the area of early hearing detection and intervention. Includes information on a national database.*

[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/ehdi](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/ehdi)

• **National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management, Utah State University -**

*Provides information and resources for hospital-based universal newborn hearing screening and state-based Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) programs.*

[www.infanthearing.org](http://www.infanthearing.org).

• **National Deaf Education Network and Clearinghouse at Gallaudet University**

*Provides information for parents and providers including resource lists, communication, organizations and legal issues.*

[ClercCenter.gallaudet.edu/InfoToGo/index.html](http://ClercCenter.gallaudet.edu/InfoToGo/index.html)

• **Part C Early Intervention Services**

*Provides information about Virginia's Implementation of Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*

[www.infantva.org](http://www.infantva.org)

*Information also is available at the Virginia Department of Health Web site,*

[www.vahealth.org/hearing](http://www.vahealth.org/hearing).

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