

News Release

Program Improves Language Skills in Deaf, Hard of Hearing

Embargoed: May 4, 2009

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CINCINNATI - Children enrolled before they are six months old in a home-based program that teaches language skills to the deaf or hard of hearing are not only able to achieve appropriate language skills but also to maintain them over time, according to a new study.

The study underscores the importance of appropriate follow-up of newborn hearing screens that determine whether a more detailed evaluation of a baby's hearing by an audiologist is needed, according to Jareen Meinzen-Derr, PhD, a researcher at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and the study's main author.

Dr. Meinzen-Derr will present her study Monday May 4 at the annual meeting of the Pediatric Academic Societies in Baltimore.

The researchers studied 328 children enrolled in Ohio's universal newborn hearing screening program. As is the case in many states, all infants born in Ohio hospitals or birthing centers receive hearing screenings before discharge. These screenings determine whether a more detailed evaluation of a baby's hearing is needed.

Newborns enrolled before 6 months of age were more likely to have age appropriate language skills than children enrolled at or after 6 months, the study found. They also maintained age appropriate skills through the age of 3 – the age at which early intervention services cease. Children enrolled at or after six months had lower baseline language skills but made significant language progress, possibly catching up to the group enrolled at an earlier age, irrespective of severity of hearing loss, according to Dr. Meinzen-Derr. The researchers did not study children past the age of three to determine the level of their language skills.

“It is important for pediatricians and family physicians to ensure that families follow up on initial screenings that indicate a possible problem with a more thorough evaluation,” says Susan Wiley, MD, a developmental pediatrician at Cincinnati Children's and a co-author of the study.

“Early intervention can and does have a great impact. We need to preserve early intervention services during these difficult economic times.”

Approximately 150,000 children are born in Ohio each year. About 6,000 of them do not pass their newborn hearing screening. Ohio infants who are identified with a permanent hearing loss are eligible for home-based language education, assistance with audiology follow-up appointments, connections to community resources,

planning for transition to preschool and other services – all at no cost to families. The Regional Infant Hearing Programs in Ohio are funded by the Ohio Department of Health.

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