



Texas Department of Health

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HRSA Publication Promotes Universal Newborn Hearing Screening

The Health Resources and Services Administration's Maternal and Child Health Bureau announces a new publication promoting universal newborn hearing screening programs.

MCHB recently distributed Early Identification of Hearing Loss-Implementing Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Programs to more than 4,000 U.S. birthing and children's hospitals that may not have such programs. The 36-page booklet is organized around 13 areas to be addressed when implementing and operating a successful early identification of hearing loss program for newborns. These include choosing equipment, training, financing, managing data and communicating with parents, doctors and hospital staff.

In 1988, when he was serving as U.S. Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop, M.D., Sc.D., set a goal that all children with significant hearing loss would be identified before their first birthday. This goal was incorporated into Healthy People 2000 as a part of a national effort to improve Americans' health by that year. At the time, it seemed like an unrealistic goal, given that the Commission on Education of the Deaf had just reported that the average age of identification of hearing loss in the United States was 2 1/2 to 3 years. Further, there was no proven method for substantially improving the techniques then being used for newborn hearing screening.

The bureau convened an advisory group that recommended support of research and development of early hearing screening techniques. Shortly thereafter, MCHB began a series of initiatives that have dramatically altered the way in which infants and children with congenital hearing loss are identified and provided with early intervention services.

In 1989, MCHB supported a demonstration project using one of the new screening technologies under development. Based at Utah State University, the project provided technical assistance to 50 hospitals in several states in developing and implementing newborn hearing screening programs. The results were used to improve the effectiveness of such hospital-based programs.

Meanwhile, a 1993 National Institutes of Health consensus conference recommended that all infants be screened before hospital discharge. Subsequent experience has shown that entering hearing-impaired children into an intervention program by 6 months of age is critical to their language and communication skills development. In 1996, the bureau launched a new technical assistance project at the University of Colorado, which now works closely with 17 states, to establish, maintain and coordinate universal newborn hearing screening programs. The project also promotes a national network of statewide programs and monitors their impact.

As a result of MCHB's efforts over the past ten years, nearly 20 percent of all infants are now being screened for hearing loss prior to discharge, and hundreds of hospitals are now operating successful universal newborn hearing screening programs. There are now at least four newborn hearing screening technologies in use that have proven to be valid, practical and cost-effective.

Copies of the document are available at no cost from the National Maternal and Child Health Clearinghouse at 703-356-1964 or through the Internet at www.nmchc.org.