

## Hearing Conservation

Children preparing for kindergarten are receiving hearing screening as part of the registration process for fall start of school. Parents are aware that good hearing is necessary for their child's success in school. Parents may not be aware that it is vital to detect problems long before time to start school. Early detection and treatment of a hearing problem can prevent problems, such as delays in language and socialization skills that may impact the child's entire school experience. Children who have to struggle to overcome delays are more likely to perform below their grade level and may feel that they are a failure. Children are much more likely to like school and to do well when they feel successful. When a hearing problem has been detected early, intervention can help the child catch up to their peers before school entrance.

For years professional organizations have recommended early detection of hearing problems so that effective intervention could be started. In the United States it is estimated that one in every 33 infants born has some kind of hearing loss and that one in 1000 infants has a severe hearing loss. New technology now allows screenings with a quick and painless procedure and it is becoming more common to conduct the screening before the infant leaves the hospital. At the beginning of this year a new Missouri law has become effective that requires all infants to have hearing screenings prior to hospital discharge. The same law requires that the medical provider assure that the screening is done for infants born outside of the hospital.

Even when the infant is healthy at birth hearing loss can develop due to accidents, medical conditions, and exposure to loud or persistent sound. Parents can help conserve the hearing of their school age children by explaining how loud music or noise can permanently damage the hearing. Children should be discouraged from use of earphones or the volume should be kept very low. The use of earphones can be harmful because the sound is transmitted directly to the ear and many children wear them for long periods of time without giving their ears a rest. Children (and adults) should be encouraged to use ear protection when working around noise caused by as lawn mowers, power equipment, etc. Temporary hearing loss and ringing of the ears (tinnitus) can be caused by loud noise for a short time. Tinnitus and the loss of ability to hear high pitched sounds can be permanent when the noise exposure is long term.

Hearing loss affects over one million children in the United States and an estimated 2,980 children between the ages of 2 and 18 years in Missouri. Specialists in the field of speech, language, and hearing urge parents to consider an evaluation if the preschool child has any of the following present:

- The child is not talking at all by age 2 years
- Speech is very difficult to understand after age 3 years
- The child is leaving out beginning sounds in words after age 3 years
- There are no sentences by age 3 years
- The child is embarrassed or disturbed by his speech
- Child's voice is extremely loud, soft or hoarse
- The child does not seem to pay attention and makes mistakes in following directions

Parents should consult their physician when they suspect a problem. Parents may wish to check out [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org) for additional general information on ears and hearing conservation and to evaluate the website for their child's possible use.