

# Some newborns don't get heart defect, hearing loss tests

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(HealthDay)—Some newborns in the United States still aren't getting screened for hearing loss or congenital heart disease, a new report shows.

"Newborn screening at birth is crucial to quickly identify [infants](#) at risk of hearing loss and congenital [inherited] [heart disease](#) so they can receive early intervention and follow-up care," said Dr. Brenda Fitzgerald, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Finding these conditions early can give infants the best chance to properly develop, and lead healthy lives," Fitzgerald added in an agency news release.

Since the 1970s, newborns in the United States have been screened for numerous health conditions through dried bloodspots, the agency explained. An estimated 4 million babies undergo screening each year.

Now, national recommendations suggest that

newborns be screened for hearing loss and critical congenital heart disease before they go home after birth.

While critical congenital heart disease is uncommon, affecting about one in 500 infants, it's the birth defect that's most likely to affect babies. It can be deadly and kills almost one-third of all babies who die from [birth defects](#). Fortunately, screening can detect cases of the illness and allow physicians to intervene, the CDC added.

But an estimated 875 U.S. newborns go home each year with congenital heart disease because they didn't undergo screening with a painless pulse oximetry test, the agency noted.

For every 200 babies born with congenital heart disease, the life of at least one infant could be saved if all newborns were screened at hospitals for the condition, the CDC said.

Researchers also estimate that almost two in every 1,000 babies have [permanent hearing loss](#), putting them at risk for delayed development. Intervention before the age of 6 months is thought to be an important tool to help the infants develop language skills later in life.

The CDC pointed to federally funded Early Hearing Detection and Intervention programs that support "1-3-6" screening guidelines for infants: Test them for [hearing loss](#) before they're 1 month old, diagnose them before the age of 3 months, and get them into an intervention before they're 6 months old.

Dr. Stuart Shapira, associate director for science at CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, said the same approach must be applied to [congenital heart disease](#) screening "to help prevent infant deaths and offer children the greatest chance to thrive."

The report was published in the Aug. 25 issue of the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

**More information:** For more about newborn screening, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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