

# Hospital to concentrate on identifying child hearing loss

BY LISA QUEEN  
Staff Writer

After being delayed by SARS last spring, a regional screening program designed to identify hearing loss in babies is set to launch Monday at Markham Stouffville Hospital.

The program, which will serve the regions of York, Durham, Haliburton, Kawartha and Pine Ridge, is aimed at detecting infants born deaf or hard of hearing to give them the head start they need.

Babies with hearing difficulties develop complex coping strategies to help them function in a world of sound.

For example, they learn to respond to visual cues or feel someone approaching through vibrations in the floor or a breeze.

But those mechanisms mask their disabilities.

On average, children are two years old before any sort of hearing loss is detected.

But the hearing screening program, operated by the York Region Preschool Speech and Language Program, will ensure hearing loss is identified soon after birth.

The pain-free, no-cost test is administered while babies are sleeping.

A technician or nurse uses a hand-

held machine that emits a clicking sound and measures the echo in the infant's ear. The test takes about a minute for both ears.

It can be administered before babies are sent home at Markham Stouffville Hospital, Southlake Regional Health Centre or York Central Hospital. There are also clinics where the test can be offered.

The program, which is being implemented across the province, allows parents to choose treatments for their children early in life.

For example, babies can be fitted for hearing aids as early as four months, begin treatment programs at the age of six months or have cochlear implants at 12 months.

About 7,500 babies are expected to be tested in York Region every year, with about eight to 10 infants identified with profound hearing loss.

Another 24 to 30 will have some sort of hearing impairment.

Babies with hearing difficulties will be referred to audiologists.

All parents will receive information detailing hearing milestones for their children as they grow up.

New moms and dads will also be reminded that children can develop hearing loss through injury or ear infections.

For more information, call 905-472-7007.

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The launch of 211 CIVC.  
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