



Media Release

11 August 2010

Southern DHB Now Offering Hearing Screening Programme for Newborns

Newborns across the Southern region are now being offered free hearing screens to ensure any hearing loss is diagnosed and interventions are put in place before it effects their future development.

The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening and Early Intervention Programme is a government initiative which has been rolled out by all DHBs nationwide. The programme was first launched at three North Island District Health Boards (DHB) in July 2007, with all DHBs having implemented the programme by July 2010.

The initiative commenced in Otago and Southland last month and is being delivered by the Southern DHB's regional screening team.

Southern DHB Screening Co-ordinator Rachel Simpson says under the programme, all babies born in the region will have their hearing screened before they are discharged from hospital or at an outpatient appointment within the first month of life.

Babies who need a follow-up from screening will have an audiology assessment carried out by three months of age. Those babies who have been identified with hearing loss will receive family centred support and interventions, such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, which will be initiated soon after diagnosis and no later than six months after birth.

Mrs Simpson said the DHB was delighted to finally be able to offer such a beneficial programme to Southland and Otago families.

"Each year in New Zealand, up to 170 babies are born with permanent congenital hearing loss," she said.

"Up until now the average age these children have had their hearing problems diagnosed at was 45 months, which has a major impact on their social, educational and cognitive development."

"If hearing loss is diagnosed early and appropriate interventions initiated, the outcomes for these children and their families will be greatly improved."

Mrs Simpson said the screening team will receive its referrals from the neonatal, maternity units at Dunedin, Southland and Lakes District Hospitals, the region's rural birthing units and lead maternity carers conducting homebirths.

Parents will also be able to self refer.

If you would like to make an appointment for a hearing screen, or would like more information, please contact the newborn hearing screening team on 0800 88 55 44.

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