



MEDIA RELEASE

Western Health Launches Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Program

For Immediate Release

(Corner Brook, NL, January 12, 2011) Western Health is pleased to announce a new program to screen hearing in all infants born at Western Memorial Regional Hospital. Through the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Program, infants born after January 1st will receive a simple hearing screening test where the infant listens to soft sounds and a specialized piece of equipment detects whether a response from the hearing organ is present.

“We are excited to be able to offer this program which provides access to early detection and intervention of hearing loss for children born in the western region,” said Michelle House, Vice President of Population Health. As many as six in 1000 babies may be born with a hearing loss and 50 per cent of infants with hearing loss do not have any risk factors for hearing loss. Without universal newborn screening, the average age of identification of hearing loss is when a child is between two and a half and three years old. Since the first three years of a child's life are critical for normal speech and language development a universal newborn hearing screening program is an important early detection initiative.

This program is a joint initiative of the Maternal Newborn unit and the Audiology Department of Western Health. A maternal newborn nurse will perform the hearing screening test. Any necessary followup required after the baby is discharged will be provided by Audiology staff.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Chapter of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA-NL) endorses universal infant hearing screening. Myrtle Barrett, President of CHHA-NL, says “The association's board of directors is always striving to develop policies which create better hearing environments for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Program is certainly a huge step in that direction when it comes to the future hearing needs of newborn children. Western Health is to be congratulated for this initiative.” In the past, CHHA-NL donated equipment to the Audiology Department which has been instrumental in diagnosing hearing loss and will continue to be used as part of the diagnostic assessments for infants referred through the universal newborn hearing screening program.

The 2007 Joint Committee on Infant Hearing Screening Position Statement recommends all infants to have access to hearing screening before one month of age. Universal newborn hearing screening programs have been implemented in many provinces across Canada and is supported by the Canadian Association of Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists as well as the Canadian Academy of Audiology.

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For further information:
Heidi Staeben-Simmons, Director of Communications
Western Health
637-5252
heidistaebensimmons@westernhealth.nl.ca