

7 in 10 newborns not tested for hearing loss: Cochlear India survey

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Hearing screening at birth crucial for timely treatment, helps children grow up on par with their hearing peers.

Most mothers (84.1%) believed that children should be tested for hearing loss at birth, but few (38.9%) actually had their child screened, found a survey by Cochlear India and First Moms Club. These findings show that while mothers are well aware of the need to detect hearing loss early in childhood, they are not fully aware of what they must do or where they can go to get their children screened. The Cochlear India survey was conducted with First Moms Club in the lead up to **World Hearing Day (March 3rd)** to find out how much Indian mothers knew about hearing loss in children.

An estimated 5-6 of every 1000 newborns suffer from some degree of hearing loss in India, but few parents are able to recognize signs or know how to seek treatment. This delays diagnosis well after the critical period of intervention.

Dr. Milind Kirtane, Senior ENT Consultant and Cochlear Implant Surgeon, PD Hinduja Hospital, Saifee Hospital and SRCC Mumbai, said, "Countries that have made newborn hearing screening mandatory are able to take corrective measures in children as young as 6 months of age. It is very encouraging to see the Kerala government push for universal newborn hearing screening and I sincerely hope the same happens countrywide. This must become our national priority."

So far, Kerala is the first state in the country to provide hearing screening for children in all government centres. The Kerala Social Security Mission developed a tablet/computer-based data management software where real time data of newborn screening can be recorded and shared with other institutions such as District Early Intervention Centers (DEICs) and medical colleges. Additionally, measures have been undertaken to ensure follow up and tracking in Anganwadies and schools.

Mr. Brett Lee, Former Australian Cricketer and Cochlear's Global Hearing Ambassador, commented, "All too often, we take little things for granted such as how much hearing matters. It was a big wake up call for me when my son was diagnosed with hearing loss at the young age of 5. We were fortunate enough to restore his hearing, but what about the millions of children who suffer with the condition every day? Early screening for hearing loss can ensure that children are diagnosed and treated early, allowing them to grow up into well adjusted adults."

Three in 10 mothers surveyed were not sure if children with hearing loss were able to hear again or lead a normal life. The earlier a child is tested, diagnosed and treated for hearing loss, greater the chances of realizing his or her full potential. Research shows that children identified with hearing loss who get early intervention can develop language (spoken and/or signed) skills on par with their peers with normal hearing. These children are able to attend mainstream schools, communicate with their teachers and classmates, make new friends and feel confident in a world full of sound.

Cochlear is supporting the call for action on hearing loss with its "Hearing Matters" awareness campaign. "Hearing Matters"

urges everyone, especially parents, to learn more about hearing loss in children so they know what signs to look out for and determine if their child may need a hearing evaluation. Any parent that is concerned about their child's hearing should seek the help of a healthcare professional, as there are many opportunities for treatment and care.