

Karleen Jackson

Commissioner

P.O. Box 110601

Juneau, AK 99011-0601

www.hss.state.ak.us



Sherry Hill

Assistant Commissioner  
for Public Affairs

907.465.1618

cell: 907.321.2838

sherry.hill@alaska.gov

## Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Jan. 17, 2008

Contact: Greg Wilkinson, (907) 269-7285, Cell (907) 382-7032  
Ann Potempa, (907) 269-7957, Cell (907) 240-9158

### **Newborn screening regulations go into effect today**

*Parents are encouraged to ask for results*

(Anchorage, AK) —Beginning Jan. 17, 2008, new regulations go into effect requiring that every birthing facility in Alaska provide newborn hearing screening within one month of birth. The goal is for any child who shows signs of hearing loss to be diagnosed within three months and begin receiving intervention services within six months.

As many as 30 babies are born in Alaska every year with some level of hearing loss.

“Newborn hearing screening has been the standard in Alaska for many years,” said Beth Kaplan, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention program manager for the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. “These changes just make it official.”

Early detection, diagnosis and intervention are critical when dealing with hearing loss.

“Prior to this type of testing, many children with hearing loss weren’t diagnosed until they were 3 years old, when their language development was already falling behind,” Kaplan said. “These regulations provide a process for the family to begin receiving services as soon as possible. Children can be fitted with hearing aids within the first months of life.”

All hospitals in Alaska have the necessary equipment to screen each baby’s hearing, to determine whether the mechanics of the ear are working properly and to evaluate the brain’s ability to respond to sound. The tests are painless and harmless.

Parents can also watch for simple signs to help them recognize if their child’s hearing and speech are developing normally. Before 3 months of age a child should startle at sudden loud noises and calm down when you speak. Between 3 months and 6 months, children should turn their heads or move their eyes to find your voice. By 10 months a child should begin to understand simple words like ‘no’ and ‘bye-bye.’ By 15 months a child should be repeating simple words and sounds.

“If parents aren’t told the results of their infant’s hearing screening, they need to ask,” Kaplan said. “Then, if necessary, they can begin the diagnostic follow-up.”

For more information on newborn screening go to:

[http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/wcfh/screening\\_testing.htm](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/wcfh/screening_testing.htm)

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