

# Diagnosing deafness early will help teenagers' reading development

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/public domain

Deaf teenagers have better reading skills if they were identified as deaf by the time they were nine months old, research from the University of Southampton has shown.

The Southampton team has been studying the development of a group of [children](#) who were identified with permanent childhood hearing

impairment (PCHI) at a very early age in a pilot screening programme conducted in Southampton and London in the 1990s.

Follow up assessments when the children were aged eight showed those who were screened at birth had better language skills than those children who were not screened. This new study, published in *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, has now shown that longer term benefits of early detection also occur following assessments at aged 17.

The study assessed the teenagers' level of reading development and compared them to deaf teenagers who were not screened as newborn babies. The gap between the early and late confirmed groups had doubled between the two assessments.

Colin Kennedy, professor of neurology and paediatrics at the University of Southampton and a consultant paediatric neurologist at Southampton General Hospital, led the study. He comments: "Our previous work has shown that children exposed to newborn [hearing screening](#) had, on average, better language and reading abilities at age eight years. We are now able to show that this screening programme can benefit these children into their teenage years.

"We believe that the early superiority in the [reading skills](#) of the children who were screened may have enabled them to read more demanding material more frequently than their peers with later confirmed hearing difficulties, thus increasing the skill gap between the two groups.

"Screening all babies for hearing impairment at birth enables families to have the information they need to support their baby's development, leads to benefits of practical importance at primary school and now, secondary school and further education."

The Southampton team believes these new results support the case for

national governments to fund universal newborn [hearing](#) screening programmes that increase the rates of early confirmation of [hearing difficulties](#) in the many developed and developing countries where [screening](#) programmes for deafness are currently under discussion, but not yet adopted as national policy.

**More information:** The impact of universal newborn hearing screening on long-term literacy outcomes: a prospective cohort study, *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 2014.

Provided by University of Southampton

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