

Focus On Meningitis and Childhood Deafness

- Meningitis is one of the most common reasons for children becoming deaf.* There are two main types of deafness - conductive and sensori-neural. Sensori-neural is the only type that follows meningitis

- Meningitis can cause sensori-neural deafness in a number of ways:
 - most commonly the infection spreads directly into the inner ear. This causes damage to the cochlea, the small bony structure in the inner ear that is essential for hearing
 - inflammation of the auditory nerve which carries sound signals to the brain

- All children who have had meningitis should have their hearing tested as soon as possible after their illness. Hearing should be tested again around six weeks after leaving hospital

- All hearing losses are different. The levels of deafness are usually described in four ways - mild, moderate, severe and profound. Some will change over time and some will stay the same, therefore, it is important that children's hearing is tested regularly

- Children who experience deafness following meningitis can also suffer from balance problems. This is because the balance organs (vestibular apparatus) share the same internal fluid as the inner ear

- There is a range of communication options available to deaf children and their families. All deaf children have different needs, so the way in which they communicate will vary. Communication options include oral skills such as speech and lip-reading, sign language or a combination of both
- There is a wide range of technological aids available that can help children to communicate such as hearing aids and cochlear implants. It is important for a child's development that a method is chosen that enables effective communication
- Cochlear implants provide a sensation of hearing by directly stimulating the auditory nerve. This device has an external part and an internal part, which is surgically implanted into the ear
- Many different organisations offer deaf children and their family's help and support. Both the Meningitis Trust and the National Deaf Children's Society (NDSC) can provide information and support as well as information on additional sources of help

** the term deafness is used to cover all types of hearing loss*