Congenital hearing loss

The standard estimate of congenital hearing loss (one in 1,000 live births) appears to underestimate actual congenital hearing loss as reported in data from states with universal newborn screening programs. Estimates based on recent data place this number at two to three per 1,000 live births. These data do not include children who are born with normal hearing and have late-onset or progressive hearing loss. Hearing loss often is sufficient to prevent the spontaneous development of spoken language. More than 50% of childhood hearing impairments are believed to be of genetic origin. Earliest possible identification of infant hearing loss has been widely endorsed as critical for the developing child. Minimal hearing loss also is an important factor in school success and psychosocial development.

Early identification of hearing loss and treatment in newborns has a dramatic and positive impact on speech development, language development and learning. Even a six-month delay in treatment of newborns can make the difference between a special education and a mainstream education. According to a 1993 study by the Marion Downs Center, children who do not require special education save a school system as much as $348,000 during a 12-year education. The lifetime costs of profound hearing loss, according to the Downs study, can total as much as $1 million.