Hearing Protection: In Utero

Hearing protection starts in the womb! Although not all causes of hearing loss are preventable, some are. Mothers can help protect themselves and their unborn babies by doing the following:

• **Practicing healthy habits.** A variety of factors can increase the risk of a baby being born deaf or hard of hearing, including preterm birth, low birth weight, maternal diabetes, certain illnesses and infections (such as rubella or herpes simplex virus), and maternal drug and alcohol use. Pregnant mothers should strive for a healthy lifestyle, which includes avoiding alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs; staying up to date on vaccinations; and reducing risk of infection by cooking raw food thoroughly and washing hands frequently.

• **Minimizing noise-related occupational hazards.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, working in a noisy job while pregnant can affect mother and baby. Loud noise may increase the chances of having a baby with hearing loss by (1) increasing maternal stress, which can affect a developing fetus (loud noise can create physical and psychological stress) and (2) directly damaging baby’s hearing (though muffled, sound can travel through a mother’s body and reach a baby in the womb).

• **Explore family history/genetics.** Many babies who are deaf or hard of hearing have a family history. Hereditary hearing loss can come from one or both parents. Hearing loss may also be due to genetic causes such as Down syndrome or Usher syndrome. If there is a family history, parents need to be especially attuned to early signs of hearing loss.

Learn more at [www.asha.org/public](http://www.asha.org/public) and [www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org).