



**HEALTH**  
KwaZulu-Natal

Natalia, 330 Langalibalele Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201  
Private Bag X 9051, Pietermaritzburg, 3200  
Tel.: 033- 395 2220, Fax.: 033-845 0141 or 033 342 0429  
Email.:mbali.thusi@kznhealth.gov.za  
www.kznhealth.gov.za

---

**TO: ALL MEDIA**  
**DATE: 24 AUGUST 2006**  
**EMBARGO: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**DEAF AWARENESS WEEK 2006**  
**24-30 AUGUST**

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health is observing Deaf Awareness Week from the 24 to 30 August 2006. DAW is a week dedicated to educating the public about hearing loss, Deafness, Deaf Culture and Sign Language. The aim is to ensure that hearing people understand Deafness and the culture of the Deaf Community.

**WHAT IS HEARING LOSS?**

A person who is unable to hear some sounds is said to present with HEARING LOSS. A person who is able to hear some sounds is said to be HARD OF HEARING. A person who is unable to hear any sounds is said to be DEAF.

The ear is made up of 3 parts i.e. outer, middle and inner ear. Hearing loss can result from an obstruction or damage in any of these 3 parts the outer ear, middle ear and inner ear.

**CAUSES OF HEARING LOSS**

- OUTER EAR include excessive accumulation of ear wax or infection of the auditory canal.
- MIDDLE EAR include perforation of the eardrum, infection or fluid in the middle ear and otosclerosis.
- INNER EAR include the natural aging process, excessive exposure to noise, medication that is toxic to the auditory system and head injuries

The following are indicators associated with hearing loss in children:

If during pregnancy the mother had Rubella/ German measles or Maternal Syphilis, prematurity, delayed labour, birth trauma, lack of oxygen, in utero infection, birth weight less than 1500 grams, jaundice, ototoxic medication (medication for conditions such as T.B.), bacterial infections eg. Meningitis, viral infections, eg. Measels, Mumps or if the child has a syndrome associated with hearing loss and a positive family history of hearing loss

## **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HEARING LOSS**

- Discharging ears
- Earaches/pain in area of head/ear
- Ringing, buzzing and roaring sounds in the ear
- Swelling around ear
- Dizziness
- “Blocked sensation” in the ear
- Frequent requests for repetitions
- Sits near the television or has the volume loud
- A babies babbling ceases around 6-8 months of age or the babbling is replaced by screaming.
- Insufficient language development as the child grows and difficulty in following instructions.

## **PREVENTION OF HEARING DIFFICULTIES**

- Attend to earaches, discharge and discomfort in the ear immediately
- Do not insert any objects into the ear canal.
- Do not instill ear drops not prescribed for yourself into your ears.
- Do not expose your ears to excessively loud music for extended periods of time.
- Be aware of the causes of hearing difficulties and its applicability to yourself
- Screen your hearing ability regularly.

Hearing loss can be detected at birth. Therefore, a newborn that is at risk for a hearing loss must be referred immediately.

## **DEAF COMMUNITY AND COMMUNICATING WITH THE DEAF**

Deaf individuals have to use a different mode of communication to interact with other people. They use their hands to convey messages to others. South African Sign Language (SASL), is a language recognised by the South African government. Using Sign Language a Deaf individual can learn to read and write and thereby achieve a good education and contribute positively to society. By doing the following you communication with the Deaf can be enhanced.

- Establish eye contact before beginning communication
- Tap gently on the shoulder to get attention.
- Keep your face to the light and free of obstructions when communicating
- Do not stand too close.
- Speak slowly and clearly. Do not exaggerate.
- Use short simple sentences and rephrase if misunderstood.
- Use facial expressions and gestures that correspond with what you are saying
- You may write down your message.

Always remain positive and relaxed when communicating with the Deaf. Show that you care - your attitude can build confidence.

**ENDS.**

**For more information please contact Leon Mbangwa on 083 459 8695**