Four-year-old children are screened for hearing problems and some vision problems. This vision screening is done to identify children with amblyopia (lazy eye). It does not detect all vision problems, including some problems which may affect reading.

This routine screening is part of the B4 School Check. It is the 8th and final of the Well Child checks. Those children not screened at four years of age should be screened when they reach school.

Vision Hearing Technicians
Most vision and hearing screening is conducted by Vision Hearing Technicians (VHTs) who are employed by District Health Boards. They are trained specifically for this role and conduct screening in schools, early childhood education centres and other community settings such as Plunket rooms or doctors’ clinics.

Getting the results of vision and hearing screening
Early Childhood Educators should ask their VHT for the results of screening conducted on children in their care.

In most areas teachers can access the results of vision and hearing screening of children they teach through the ENROL database. If you are unsure how to access these results, talk to your school Principal or VHT.

Educators should be familiar with the results of screening conducted on children in their care.

For more information on vision and/or hearing screening:
- Contact a local VHT by calling your district health board
- Go to the B4 School Check website at: http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/childhealth-b4schoolcheck-educators
- Talk to your Principal or Early Childhood Education centre Manager

Providing an appropriate screening environment
It is important that the VHT has access to a suitable room for vision and hearing screening. Inappropriate conditions may compromise the validity of test results.

The room in which the screening takes place must:
- be quiet and free of noise from outside sources
- have soft furnishings and floor coverings to absorb noise
- be well lit and at least five metres long
- be free of distractions

Educators can play a key role in the identification of children with potential vision and hearing problems by:
1. Encouraging parents/caregivers to seek help for their child if there is a concern about the child’s vision or hearing
2. Supporting and encouraging parents/caregivers to follow through with assessments and any recommended interventions
3. Encouraging the use of prescribed aids at home and school.
As part of routine Well Child checks children are screened for a condition called amblyopia (lazy eye). Most children are screened at four years of age, but those who are not screened at four should be screened in their first year at school.

This screening does NOT detect all vision problems.

Children do not routinely have their vision checked again until they are in year seven, when all children are screened for distance vision problems and boys have their colour vision checked.

If you are concerned about a child's vision or eyes it is important that they have their vision assessed by an eye-care professional.

Identifying vision problems early is crucial to ensure the best health and educational outcomes for the child.

Understanding the results of vision screening

**Pass result** - This means no amblyopia was detected by the screening. However, they could have another vision problem or they may develop a vision problem later.

**Re-test result** – Sometimes it may be difficult to get a result as the child may be tired or unable to concentrate. As a result the child may need to be retested at a later date. The VHT will arrange the retests at an appropriate time.

**Refer result** - This means that the child may have amblyopia or another vision problem and a full assessment by an eye-care professional is needed to determine whether a vision problem exists, and ensure appropriate treatment.

The “refer result” of a vision screening is sent to the family. Families of children who are referred from a vision screening also receive information about how to get the recommended full vision assessment.
The hearing screen is undertaken to look for hearing loss or middle ear problems such as glue ear. Most children are screened at four years of age, but those who are not screened at this time should be screened in their first year at school. Children who pass the B4 School Check hearing screen will not routinely have their hearing checked again, so if you are concerned about a child’s hearing or ears it is important that they have an assessment.

Identifying hearing problems early and getting help for the child is important to ensure the best health and educational outcomes.

Interpreting the results

Pass result - This means no problem was found by the screening. However, it is possible that there is a fluctuating problem, or that the child may develop a problem later, and so it is important that educators pay attention to signs of a potential hearing problem.

Ongoing vigilance – detecting hearing problems early
If a child has speech or language difficulties, has trouble following instructions, is easily distracted or inattentive in class they may have a hearing problem. These symptoms may fluctuate.

If you have concerns about a child’s hearing you can:
- Ask for the VHT to screen the child for hearing and middle ear problems when they next visit (VHTs visit preschools, primary and intermediate schools); OR
- Encourage the child’s family to arrange for a full hearing assessment for their child at the audiology department of their local hospital or with a local audiologist or ENT Specialist.

A smelly discharge from the ear could indicate a serious health problem. Immediate medical referral is required.

Educators who notice a discharge from a child’s ear (apart from wax) should encourage the child’s parents to take them to see their family doctor or the local Ear Nurse Specialist if they are available in your area. Contact your local VHT to discuss the options.

Encouraging parents to get their child assessed
An assessment at the hospital audiology clinic is free, although the family may need a referral from their GP. Support for children with hearing loss or auditory processing disorders is available free of charge to the family. Alternatively, parents can arrange assessment, without referral, with a private audiologist. Charges will apply in this instance.

Retest result – Sometimes it may be difficult to get a result as the child may be tired or unable to concentrate. As a result the child may need to be retested at a later date. The VHT will arrange the retests at an appropriate time.

Refer result - This means that the child may have a hearing problem and a full assessment is needed to determine whether a hearing problem exists, and ensure appropriate treatment. Results of hearing screening are sent to the family, as well as information on how the family can detect potential hearing problems. Families of children who are referred also receive information about how to get a full hearing assessment.