

# The Importance of Screening for Vision Problems in Children with Hearing Impairments



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Early identification of a vision impairment for those individuals who are hard of hearing or deaf can help the individual, family, and teacher to acquire the information needed to appropriately meet the individual's needs. It is important to remember that:

- Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing rely on their vision to interact and communicate with others.
- Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing rely heavily on their vision to learn.

There are a variety of reasons that individuals who are hard of hearing or deaf may be at risk for vision impairments. For example, approximately 3-6% of the hard of hearing population and 3-6% of the deaf population are estimated to have Usher syndrome. Usher syndrome is a genetic disorder in which hearing loss generally occurs at birth or shortly thereafter; while a progressive loss of vision due to retinitis pigmentosa (a degeneration of the retina of the eyes) begins later in life, usually before adolescence.

A number of other conditions exist that increase the possibility that individuals who are hard of hearing or deaf might also have vision impacted.

If an individual who is hard of hearing or deaf also has vision impairments, it is important to identify those impairments as early as possible to address the impact of the additional impairment:

- Corrective lenses might be needed.
- The individual, parents, and teachers can plan for education, vocational experiences, and career planning taking into account the combined hearing and vision losses.
- The appropriate related educational services can be provided (e.g., orientation and mobility).
- Knowing about a visual impairment might influence decisions regarding communication.
- Specific adaptations might be incorporated into the classroom (e.g., lighting, contrast, room arrangements, low vision devices).

