

Program tests toddlers' hearing

BY STEVEN WARD

Advocate staff writer

Babies and toddlers enrolled in the YWCA Greater Baton Rouge Early Head Start program have access to new, technologically advanced hearing screenings.

The children can have their hearing tested via a quick, painless and reliable technology known as Otoacoustic Emissions, according to a YWCA news release.

The Baton Rouge program is one of two pilot programs in Louisiana, said Kay Galloway, YWCA Greater Baton Rouge Early Head Start's health and nutrition manager.

The other pilot program in the state is in Lafayette, she said.

Testing started on the Baton Rouge program in June, Galloway said. Testing on the 165 children in the program was finished in October, she said.

The test involves putting some foam on a little probe that is inserted in both ears, Galloway said.

The probe sends off a sound, like a bird tweet, through the ear canal, Galloway said. If the child's hearing is good, she said, the sound will bounce back as an echo on that shows up on handheld machine.

The test takes about three minutes for both ears, Galloway said.

Children who do not pass the screening are retested a few times and, if needed, referred to an audiologist who can perform a complete evaluation, Galloway said.

"The technology is very precise and accurate," Galloway said.

The equipment cost \$6,000, Galloway said.

The screenings are held annually and will start again in June.

Data shows that, at birth, one of every 300 babies has permanent hearing loss and by age 6, two of every 300 children are not able to hear clearly in one or both ears, according to the release.

Some parents sometimes assume that their child's hearing will be checked during well-child visits, according to the release.

Doctors and health-care providers routinely check for ear infections and perform informal hearing tests, the release says, but they are usually not armed with the cutting-edge technology the YWCA Early Head Start program is offering to its infants and toddlers.

Galloway said 80 percent of the children in the program passed the test.

The hearing screening technology the YWCA uses is funded by the Office of Head Start and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau as the National Resource Center on Early Hearing Detection and Intervention.

HEARING

Continued from page 1B

"We are just happy to have been chosen for the program and we feel good about being able to catch problems that can be taken care of," Galloway said.

For more information about the YWCA Greater Baton Rouge Early Head Start program and the hearing screenings, call (225) 383-0681.

THE ADVOCATE

SECTION B

WEDNESDAY

JANUARY 4, 2012