

Use of Sign Language, Spoken Language or Both in Children with Hearing Loss Undergoing Cochlear Implants

June 12, 2017

One of the most controversial areas in helping children with hearing loss is whether there is benefit to the use of sign language to help deaf children communicate. The issue gets even more controversial when a child is to undergo a cochlear implant.

Dr. Lewis First, MD, MA, Editor in Chief, Pediatrics

Content License: FreeView

Article type: [Pediatrics Blog](#)



One of the most controversial areas in helping children with hearing loss is whether there is benefit to the use of sign language to help deaf children communicate. The issue gets even more controversial when a child is to undergo a cochlear implant. So does use of sign language before and after a cochlear implant improve a child's ability for speech recognition, spoken language intelligibility, or reading skills? Geers et al. ([10.1542/peds.2016-3489](#)) report on three groups of children with

hearing-impairment who received cochlear implants by three years of age but differed in their duration of sign language exposure early in their lives, and then followed their progress in elementary school. The results may surprise many but show that the group who had no early sign-language exposure did the best in achieving better speech recognition in their first three years post-implant and did better than the other children exposed to sign language in terms of their performance in spoken and auditory speech recognition.

These findings certainly differ from those reported in earlier studies, prompting us to welcome a commentary from Drs. Karl White and Louis Cooper ([10.1542/peds.2017-1287](#)). Drs. White and Cooper point out some limitations of the Geer study (such as whether the results would differ if a child's parents were deaf as well) and raise the question of whether we should make teaching sign-language an option rather than a mandate for families of hearing impaired children as some might hope or recommend. If you have a child with hearing-impairment in your practice, what have you recommended? Will this study change what you have recommended going forward? We welcome your comments by responding to this blog, adding a comment on our website when you link to the study, or by posting your thoughts on our Facebook or Twitter sites.

- [Changing Neurodevelopment at 8 Years in Children Born Extremely Preterm Since the 1990s](#)
- [The Need to Optimize Adolescent Immunization](#)

- [Hearing Loss in Children With Asymptomatic Congenital Cytomegalovirus Infection](#)
- [Chronic Conditions and Health Care Needs of Adolescents Born at 23 to 25 Weeks' Gestation](#)
- [Twenty-year Follow-up of Kangaroo Mother Care Versus Traditional Care](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)

Copyright © 2017 American Academy of Pediatrics