



## MID-MICHIGAN DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Your public health team, connecting with our communities to achieve healthier outcomes

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### Hearing and vision program dedicated to kids



Hearing and Vision Technicians Shawn Evans, Mary Wallen and Stacey Peterman

Stanton, MI- Children are usually pretty good at expressing their wants and needs. If they are hungry, they tell their parents so. If a scraped knee is causing them pain, they cry and point to their ouchy. If they want to cuddle, they climb up on a loved one's lap. If they are overly tired, their whiny, grumpy disposition is a dead giveaway.

But when a child can't see or hear as well as they should, they are not always able to express it to an adult because they are unaware themselves that there is a problem. It's all they've known, so they think it's normal.

As a result, many children start school with these undiagnosed problems, which greatly affects their ability to read, pay attention, follow directions, and ultimately learn. But school achievement isn't the

only thing that suffers in this type of situation. Hearing and vision difficulties often lead to behavioral problems as well, which creates a host of additional problems not only at school, but at home and in the community.

Diagnosing these problems at an early age is so important. That's why the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), in conjunction with the Michigan Department of Community Health MDCH), has been conducting free hearing and vision screenings for preschool and school-age children for over 60 years. Making sure that children in Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties are seeing and hearing properly is a job MMDHD takes very seriously.

"Our trained Hearing and Vision Technicians are committed to providing all children in our district with the highest quality hearing and vision screens to ensure they have the skills to succeed in school and in life," said MMDHDs Andrea Tabor, Community Health and Education Division Director.

For Hearing and Vision Technician Mary Wallen, who screens children in Clinton County, identifying a hearing or vision loss is very rewarding and why she loves her job so much. According to Wallen, children are very good at accommodating for hearing and vision losses and it's often difficult for a parent to know if their child has a problem until they are screened. "We find hearing and vision deficiencies on a daily basis," she said, "And I cannot wait to screen that child again later in the year, because when I do, there is a good chance the problem will have been corrected, or that there is a medical professional working towards the best possible outcome. It's such a great feeling to know I made a difference in a child's life!"

Stacey Peterman, Hearing and Vision Technician in Gratiot County, is thrilled each time she and her colleagues get positive feedback from principals, teachers and parents. But what really gets her excited is when she hears specific success stories, one of which has made a lasting impression. A few years ago, she received a heartfelt thank you letter from a parent who had struggled with her son's behavior in school. They had him tested for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Attention Deficit Disorder, trying to get to the root of the problem. It was frustrating for this mom to try to figure out how to correct the problem, and she was, quite frankly, at her wits end. That's when Peterman, who, during a routine screen at the child's

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school, discovered a problem with the child's vision. After months and months of psychological testing, this mom finally had the answer she was searching for--- her son didn't have a disorder, he just needed glasses! He had not been able to follow along in class because he couldn't see the board. His frustration led to him to act out, which is common in this type of situation. The parent was relieved and extremely thankful that Peterman was able to provide the service and was happy to report that the child is now on track with his grades and behavior.

Identifying problems that may have gone undetected for quite some time is what Hearing and Vision Technician Shawn Evans likes most about her job. Evans, who screens children in Montcalm County, has lost track of the number of times she's identified a hearing or vision problem. But knowing that she plays a small part in bettering a child's life never gets old.

“As hearing and vision technicians, it's our job to identify a need and, if all goes according to plan, the next time we see the child the problem will have been corrected. And that's what it's all about- the end result -seeing a child with their new hearing aid or glasses and knowing that they will make a real difference - that's what makes it all worthwhile.”

Michigan law requires the Hearing Screening Program to test children at least once between the ages of three and five years and every other year between the ages of five and ten.

Goals of the program include identifying hearing loss as early as possible, reducing preventable hearing loss and ear disease, identifying hearing impaired children so their educational, medical and social needs can be met, and helping parents and school personnel understand the child's hearing loss needs.

Early identification of hearing problems is so important as it can alleviate speech/language, social/emotional, academic and psychological delays.

Your child may have a hearing problem if they:

- Have a history of ear infections or drainage from the ear
- Ask to have the volume turned up on the television or radio
- Misunderstand directions or ask to have things repeated

Michigan law also requires vision screening of pre-school children is conducted at least once between the ages of three and five years, and school-age children are screened in grades one, three, five, seven and nine, or in conjunction with driver training classes.

Early identification of vision problems is equally important, as it can lead to the discovery and treatment of conditions like amblyopia, or lazy eye.

The vision screening tests for clearness of vision, eye muscle balance, nearsightedness, farsightedness, and symptoms of other eyesight problems.

Your child may have a vision problem if they:

- Squint or tilt their head to see
- Have an eye that crosses or wanders when they are ill or tired
- Hold objects close to their eyes

MMDHDs Hearing and Vision trio has over 40 years of combined experience and screens almost 25,000 students in the agency's three counties each year. If they could give one piece of advice to parents and guardians, it's this: if your child is screened in school, and you receive a letter from one of them, suggesting that the child see a specialist, take the referral seriously and follow through right away. The earlier a problem is identified, the sooner it may be corrected and permanent damage may be prevented. Early identification also increases the child's opportunity for academic and social success.

Children are screened in all Michigan schools, including public, private, parochial, and charter schools. Children not enrolled in a formal program can be screened at MMDHD by appointment. Those living in Clinton County may call 989-224-2195. Those living in Gratiot County may call 989-875-3681. Those living in Montcalm County may call 989-831-5237.