

When do babies say their first words?

Spring 2021



Babies make lots of communicative noises, but coos, gurgles, and cries aren't true speech. When do babies say their first words? When do they develop the ability to express themselves using language?

Experts used to say it is around 12 months, but we have recent evidence to know it is likely between 6 and 14 months.

Surveys completed by parents as per several studies indicate more than 50% of babies are speaking their first words by 10 months (Schneider et al 2015).

Here are the details about when babies start talking -- and what to look for if you are concerned about developmental delays.

1. From birth onwards, babies make a variety of vocal sounds. But it isn't until around 4-10 months that babies begin

repeating sounds that we recognize: consonant + vowel, like "ma ma ma" or "ba ba ba" (Oller et al 2001). This will become the building blocks of true words.

If you are not hearing those syllables by 9 months, this is something you need to monitor and talk to your pediatrician about your concerns.

2. Throughout the world, infants are typically speaking their first words by 11-13 months, and research suggests that most babies show major improvements in their ability to understand speech by 14 months (Bergelson, Swingley 2012).

If your baby is approaching 14 months and still has not spoken any words, consult with your pediatrician.

A speech-language pathologist can get your child back on track. Start with a virtual consultation to determine an appropriate course of action.

ABOUT KIDSPEECH

We have provided speech and language services to children since 1988. Our work focuses on early speech and language development, phonology/ articulation skills, both receptive and expressive language as well as literacy (reading & reading) and other academic issues.