



FACT SHEET

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Deafblindness

Deafblindness is a combination of any level of deafness combined with any type of vision loss. Some vision and hearing are issues with how the eyes or ears work. Others are brain-based such as cerebral visual impairment (CVI) or auditory neuropathy. There is a wide range of physical and developmental ability among deafblind individuals based on the etiology, the degree of vision loss or level of hearing, the onset of the hearing or vision loss, and any additional disabilities and/or health issues. Deafblindness limits an individual's ability to gather information in the immediate environment and from people and objects around them. It can also affect their mobility and other senses.

Estimates indicate that there are approximately 40,000 people in the United States who are deafblind. The 2021 National Deaf-Blind Child Count reported approximately 10,000 individuals aged birth through 21 in the United States and Territories. California consistently reports approximately 1,000 children and youth with deafblindness. There are at multiple causes of deafblindness including: prematurity; hereditary disorders; genetic disorders such as CHARGE Syndrome, Usher Syndrome, and Down Syndrome; prenatal exposures such congenital cytomegalovirus (CMV); illness such as meningitis; and injury from an accident.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines deafblindness as: "Deafblindness means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness." [34 C.F.R. § 300.8 (c) (2)]

Individuals who are deafblind need early intervention and personal attention to stimulate their understanding and interest in the world around them. The incidental information and concepts that most typically-developing children pick-up naturally must be deliberately introduced to children who are deafblind.

Communication and mobility are often the most affected areas of life for a person with deafblindness which can cause feelings of isolation and loneliness. Development of compensatory skills can help bridge this gap. Trainings and instructional strategies are available to parents and educators relative to communication and mobility. Upon request California Deafblind Services provides assistance to families and schools to address individual child-specific needs.

References: National Center on Deaf-Blindness. (2022). 2021 National deaf-blind child count. <https://www.nationaldb.org/products/national-child-count/report-2021>