

Newborn Screening for Critical Congenital Heart Defects Parental Advice and Support

What is Newborn Screening for Critical Congenital Heart Defects?

Newborn screening for critical congenital heart defects tests the oxygen level in a baby's blood to see if he or she may have a serious heart defect. Congenital heart defects (CHD) are the most common birth defects in the United States, affecting about 1 in every 110 babies. A few babies born with CHD have more serious forms called "critical" CHD or CCHD. CCHDs are heart defects that could cause serious illness or even death if not found quickly, and they affect about 2 of every 1,000 babies. Babies with CCHD usually have lower oxygen levels in their blood than is normal. Health care provider can perform a quick and easy screening to test for a possible CCHD in your baby.

How is Screening for Critical Congenital Heart Defects Done?

Currently, babies can be screened for CCHD using a pulse oximeter, which tests the amount of oxygen in the blood. It is a painless and simple test that is usually done between 24-48 hours after a baby is born. This screening is done by putting a wrap around the baby's hand and foot—nothing goes into the baby's skin or hurts the baby. This test can be done quickly unless the baby is moving a lot or crying. If the baby is moving a lot or crying, the health care provider performing the test may have to wait until the baby is lying still and quiet to do the test.

What Does It Mean if My Baby Passes the Screening?

Most babies are born healthy but every parent should know the warning signs of a possible CHD. Some warning signs are: trouble breathing, poor eating, excessive sleepiness, problems gaining weight, and bluish color. Should your baby ever show any of these symptoms, please call your health care provider right away. This screening will catch most CCHDs, but it will not catch all of them.

What Does It Mean if My Baby Fails the Screening?

If the level of oxygen in your baby's blood is below normal, your baby will fail the screening. If your baby fails the screening, it means that your baby MAY have a CCHD, but it does not mean that your baby definitely has a CCHD. There are other problems that can cause low oxygen in the blood. The doctor will perform more tests to try to find out if your baby has a CCHD or not. If your baby does have a CCHD, your baby may need other treatments, even surgery. Don't hesitate to ask any questions you have—your health care provider will be glad to answer them.

If you would like more information about congenital heart defects, visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/heartdefects/>

<http://www.babysfirsttest.org/>

Critical Congenital Heart Disease Screening Program

