

What is a Newborn Screening Test?

Newborn screening tests check for rare but serious conditions in babies just after birth. All states require certain screening tests to be performed on newborns, even if they appear healthy. Most of the disorders your baby is checked for have no visible signs at birth. Catching these conditions early gives doctors a critical edge in treating them before they can cause your baby serious and lasting harm. Hearing and heart screenings are also done.

Screening tests tell doctors whether to do more precise diagnostic testing, which is needed to determine whether there is truly a problem. Most babies screened have no true disease. Only about one third of one percent of screened babies are actually diagnosed with a condition or disorder.

The nursing staff at the hospital will take care of getting your baby's hearing and heart screenings done and will collect blood for the other tests by the time you leave. The blood collected will be sent to a lab at the Bureau of Public Health in Jacksonville and the results will be sent to your pediatrician.

It's up to each state to decide what to screen for. The State of Florida screens for 35 core disorders and 22 secondary conditions. You can find a list on the State of Florida Newborn screening Program website.

The blood tests require just one quick prick of a needle on your baby's heel to collect a blood sample. For the hearing test, a small, soft earphone is temporarily placed in your baby's ear. The screen for congenital heart defects, known as pulse oximetry, is also painless. Sensors are put on your baby's skin for several minutes to determine the amount of oxygen in the baby's blood and the rate of the baby's pulse. These procedures cause very little discomfort. In fact, many babies sleep through them.

It's extremely unlikely that your baby will have one of the conditions being tested for as they are all very rare. If there is something wrong, though, it is far better to know as soon as possible because many of the conditions can have severe consequences if left untreated, from intellectual disability to organ damage or even death. Most of the conditions can be improved or completely controlled with fairly simple measures, such as monitoring your child's diet or giving certain medications.

If the screening results are abnormal, the Newborn Screening Follow-up Program will contact the parent and/or doctor about additional testing and continue follow-up until the disorder is either ruled out or confirmed.

Newborn screening tests are an important part of your child's health care and an excellent public health service.