

Baby's First Test: Heart Disease Screening

After your baby is born, they will be screened for several rare, but treatable conditions. Screening tests can find health problems early, before symptoms start.

One of the first tests your baby will have is called pulse oximetry, or pulse ox for short.

Pulse ox is a simple, painless way to screen for critical congenital heart disease (or CCHD). CCHD is a group of serious heart defects that are present from birth. They are the most common types of birth defects.

Pulse oximetry measures the amount of oxygen in your baby's blood using sensors placed on their hands and feet. Babies who do not pass the test the first time will be screened again, and may need more testing.

Screening tests like pulse oximetry are necessary because babies with heart defects can look healthy at birth. Catching health problems early can make sure a baby gets the care they need as soon as possible. Of course, no screening can catch all heart defects or other concerns. And pulse ox cannot detect all forms of CCHD.

So call your child's healthcare provider right away if you notice your baby has any of these symptoms of CCHD: Blue or purple tint to their skin, lips, or fingernails; Fast breathing or shortness of breath; Swelling in the face, hands, or legs; Getting tired easily; Sweating around the head; Or poor weight gain.

If you have any questions about newborn screening, talk with your healthcare provider or visit newbornscreening.hrsa.gov.