Intermountain® Healthcare

Newborn Screenings and Treatments

This fact sheet explains some of the important care that new babies receive shortly after birth. It includes the following screenings and treatments:

- Vitamin K treatment
- Eye medication treatment
- Bilirubin screening
- Hearing screening
- Heart defect screening
- Newborn screening

Each of these screenings or treatments is routine for all newborns at all Intermountain hospitals. Some of them are required by state law. That's because **studies show that these procedures can protect your baby's health and well-being**.

Vitamin K treatment

It is a routine practice to give a small amount of vitamin K to all newborn babies soon after birth. The vitamin is given in a shot (injection). The shot is given in the baby's muscle, usually in the thigh. Only one shot is given.

Giving vitamin K lowers the chance that your newborn will have dangerous bleeding. That's because newborns have too little vitamin K in their bodies. Since vitamin K helps blood to clot, too little of this important vitamin can sometimes lead to bleeding — even death. Since hospitals began giving vitamin K to newborns, there have been almost no deaths from bleeding problems.

Eye medication treatment

In this treatment, medicated ointment is put into your baby's eyes soon after birth. The ointment is usually given only one time. There is no risk from the ointment, although your baby's eyes may be a bit puffy for a time.

The eye ointment helps protect your baby against eye infections. Eye infections occur in up to 12% of newborns. These infections often happen during birth, as the baby passes through the birth canal. They can also happen later, during care of the newborn. These infections can cause serious problems, including blindness.

Bilirubin screening

Bilirubin screening is a routine practice to screen every newborn for high bilirubin levels in the blood (hyperbilirubinemia). The screening is done before your baby leaves the hospital. It requires taking a small sample of blood from your baby's heel. This is then tested in a laboratory.

High levels of bilirubin cause jaundice. Jaundice is a common condition in the first few days of life, and it usually goes away by itself. But if bilirubin levels are very high, your baby may need treatment to prevent serious problems, such as brain damage. A screening can detect high bilirubin early on — and help you get the right treatment for your baby. For this reason, most parents follow expert medical advice and allow this screening.

Most screening results come back normal, and parents don't need to follow up. But if your baby's results shows that your baby is at risk, you'll be instructed to take your baby to the doctor's office (or to a hospital or lab) to repeat the test a day or two after your baby goes home. It's very important that you have this follow-up test if you're told to. This is the only way to make sure that your baby is safe from the serious effects of high bilirubin.

Hearing screening

This screening is a quick, painless way to check your baby's hearing. To do the test, a specially trained medical provider puts a small rubber probe in the opening of your baby's outer ear while your baby is quiet. A computer sends out soft clicking sounds through the probe. If your baby's ears are healthy, they will "echo" the sound back to the probe.

Most of the time, parents learn right away that their baby has passed the hearing screen. But if there's no "echo" from your baby's ear to the testing device, your baby will need a second test. There are many possible reasons that a baby may not pass the first hearing screen, and only further testing will tell you why. Follow up as your baby's healthcare professional recommends. Early detection and treatment can help prevent speech and language delay.

Heart defect screening

Congenital heart disease (CHD) refers to a problem in the structure of the heart or the blood flow through the heart. If the CHD is serious, called **a critical congenital heart defect (CCHD)**, it needs to be detected and repaired early in a baby's life to help prevent other health problems.

Screening with pulse oximetry ("pulse ox" for short) allows for early detection. Pulse ox measures how much oxygen is in the blood. It requires placing a sticky strip, like a band-aid, on the baby's hand or foot. The strip has a small red light that is the sensor. The sensor is attached to a wire, which is attached to a monitor that shows the pulse ox reading.

Pulse ox is a quick, safe, and painless way to check for a common sign of CCHD — low oxygen levels. If screening with pulse ox identifies a baby with low oxygen, the care team will probably order additional testing.

Newborn Screening

Why does my baby need newborn screening?

Most babies are healthy when they are born.

We test all babies because a few babies look healthy but have a rare health problem.

If we find problems early, we can help prevent serious problems like mental retardation or death.

How will my baby be tested?

The screening test happens in two parts.

- **The first part of the test is done in the hospital.** A nurse will take a few drops of blood from your baby's heel. The hospital will send the blood sample to a newborn screening lab.
- **The second part of the test happens a few weeks after birth.** It usually happens at the doctor's office during one of your baby's early checkups.

How will I get the results of the test?

Parents are notified of test results if there is a problem.

Ask about results when you see your baby's healthcare professional.

Why do some babies need more testing?

Your baby may be retested if you leave the hospital before 24 hours.

Some babies need to be retested because there is a problem with the blood sample.

A few babies need extra testing because the first test showed a possible health problem.

What if my baby needs more testing?

Your baby's healthcare professional or the State Health Department will contact you if your baby needs more testing. They will tell you why your baby needs to more testing and what to do next.

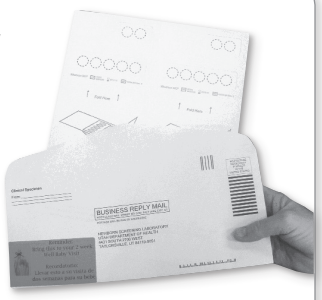
If your baby needs more testing, get it done right away.

Make sure that your hospital and healthcare professional have your correct address and phone number.

What if I have questions?

Ask your baby's healthcare professional if you have questions or concerns.

While you're still in the hospital, you may be given a follow-up screening form in an envelope. In this case, ***remember to take the form and the envelope home from the hospital — and bring it to your baby's checkup within the specified number of days.***



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