

Congenital Heart Disease Screening FAQs

What is congenital heart disease (CHD)?

CHD is a problem in the structure of the heart or the blood flow through the heart. CHD is the most common birth defect and the cause is not really known

What is pulse oximetry?

Pulse oximetry is a simple and painless procedure that measures how much oxygen is in the blood.

Why is pulse oximetry used?

Pulse oximetry is used to measure how much oxygen is in the blood. It is routinely used and can be used to monitor an infant's oxygen level during a procedure or treatment. It can also be used to determine if the baby's heart and lungs are healthy. Pulse oximetry can also help to identify babies with low levels of oxygen in their blood who may have serious heart problems. A doctor may ask for more testing such as an ultrasound of the heart (echocardiogram) when a low pulse oximetry reading is identified. The ultrasound will screen for a serious problem in the structure of the heart or the blood flow through the heart. Pulse oximetry can identify a baby with serious congenital heart disease before he or she leave the hospital.

How is pulse oximetry performed?

The pulse oximeter is placed by a sticky strip with a small red light, or "probe," on the baby's hand and foot. The probe is attached to a wire, which is attached to a special monitor that shows the pulse oximeter reading. The procedure takes just a few minutes to perform when the baby is still, quiet, and warm. If the baby is crying, squirming, or cold, it may take longer or may not be possible. You can comfort your baby and keep him or her warm, calm, and quiet while the test is being performed.

Can the pulse oximeter hurt my child?

The pulse oximetry test is non-invasive and painless. It usually does not hurt the baby.

When will the pulse oximetry test be performed?

The pulse oximetry test will be done after the baby is 24 hours old.

What is a normal reading?

Pulse oximetry readings in the hand and foot that are 95-100% and equal to or less than 3% different from each other are normal in healthy children. Children with heart or lung problems may have lower readings. A low pulse oximetry reading can be normal in newborns whose lungs and heart are adjusting after birth. If the baby has a problem with his or her heart or lungs, your doctor or nurse will tell you what a normal pulse oximetry range is for your child. It is possible that your baby's doctor will order additional tests.

Can a baby with serious CHD have a normal pulse oximetry reading?

It is possible that the pulse oximetry test will not detect all forms of problems in the baby's heart. Your baby should continue to have normal visits with his or her doctor. If a problem with the heart is suspected, your baby's doctor will advise you.

What if I have questions or do not want to have my baby screened for serious heart problems?

If you have a question about pulse oximetry or CHD, you should ask the doctor caring for your baby. If you do not want your baby screened for serious heart problems, you should inform your doctor or nurse.