

Pulse oximetry screening

Parent information

The pulse oximetry screening tells us your baby's blood oxygen level.

About the screening test

Pulse oximetry screening is quick, non-invasive, pain free and has been shown to be very reliable in identifying babies with congenital heart disease or other medical problems.

The other medical illnesses that may be identified through pulse oximetry include infection or persistent pulmonary hypertension (high blood pressure in the lungs).

Studies show that many of these problems may not show up on your pregnancy scans or during the baby check after birth.

Equipment and saturation probe

The pulse oximetry screening involves a saturation probe (like a tape), that is linked to a machine, being applied to your baby's hand and then foot for 1 minute while it reads the oxygen level in the blood. This test is not painful and has no side effects for your baby. The probe is a smaller version of the saturation probe that some mothers have on during their stay.



Plan

We recommend pulse oximetry screening as early as possible to identify critical congenital heart disease or serious infections, as this can save lives and lead to improved long term health and development.

Pulse oximetry screening is most reliable if performed when your baby is 24 hours of age or older. If you are taking your baby home before this time, the screening will be performed as close as possible to time of discharge. If your baby's blood oxygen level is low, your baby will not be able to go home at this early stage.

Results

If your baby has a low saturation level (low level of oxygenated blood) on screening they may require:

1. A repeat screen in an hour
2. If the level is critically low; your baby will be reviewed by a neonatologist and admitted to the neonatal unit for further investigation and treatment if required
3. Further investigations may include blood tests, chest X-ray and overnight screening of oxygen saturations.

Pulse oximetry screening will not identify all serious congenital heart disease in babies. It is still important to seek medical advice if you have concerns about your baby. Your baby's doctor or midwife may still recommend a follow up GP baby check.

Further information

For further information, please ask your midwife or baby's doctor.



Consumers contributed
to this information.