

## Screening for Newborn Heart Problems

Congratulations on the birth of your new baby! One of the things we check your baby for, before you are sent home, is heart problems. We call this screening.

The type of heart problems your baby is being screened for are called Critical Congenital Heart Disease, a group of heart defects that babies can be born with. Babies might look healthy in the first few days after birth even if they have life threatening heart problems. Screening helps your doctor or midwife look for and treat heart problems sooner so babies can be treated within the first year of life. Babies who go home with an undiagnosed heart problem can come back to the hospital very sick. It is important to know that screening does not find all types of heart problems a baby may be born with.

### How do we screen for these heart problems?

A simple and painless monitor, called **pulse oximetry**, is used to measure how much oxygen is in your baby's blood. All babies will have pulse oximetry done after they are 24 hours old, or as close to going home as possible if you are leaving the hospital before 24 hours.

Getting a reading from a pulse oximeter takes less than 5 minutes to do. You can hold your baby during the test to help keep him or her warm and quiet. A nurse will place a sensor on your baby's hand and then his or her foot. The sensor is connected by a cable to a monitor. The monitor measures the percentage of oxygen in your baby's blood.

### What do the levels mean for my baby?

The normal percentage of oxygen in the blood is 95 per cent or more. A low level of oxygen in your baby's blood does not always mean that there is a heart problem. Babies whose heart and lungs are still adjusting after birth can also have lower oxygen levels in their blood. More testing is needed to confirm if your baby has a critical congenital heart disease.

Pulse oximetry cannot find all the possible problems in a baby's heart. It is possible for a baby with a serious heart problem to have a normal pulse oximetry screen. All babies should have regular visits with a midwife or family doctor.

### What happens if the oxygen level in my baby's blood seems low?

A doctor or midwife will then look at your baby carefully for any signs that might help them understand why the oxygen level is lower. They might choose to ask a special doctor, such as a Pediatrician or a Pediatric Cardiologist, to help care for your baby. If your hospital does not have these special doctors, you might need to travel to a hospital that can give your baby special heart testing and care.

### Questions?

If you have any questions please ask the doctor, midwife and/or nurse caring for your baby.