

Testing for Congenital Heart Defects

What is a Congenital Heart Defect?

A congenital heart defect is a problem in any part of the heart that is present at birth. Heart defects usually happen during the first few weeks of pregnancy when the heart is forming. About 1 out of every 125 babies is born with a heart defect. A defect may be so small that a baby has few problems and appears healthy for many years. Some defects are serious and may cause severe health problems that can put a baby's life in immediate danger.

How the Heart Works

A healthy heart pumps oxygen-rich blood throughout the body. When the heart does not work properly, the organs in the body do not receive enough oxygen. This can cause serious problems and even death.

Using Pulse Oximetry to Test for Heart Defects

Pulse oximetry (pulse ox) is a simple and painless way to help screen your baby for a heart defect. It only takes a few minutes and measures the amount of oxygen in the blood. Your nurse puts a soft, spongy strip around your baby's hand and foot. The



spongy strip holds a red light in place that attaches to a wire and monitor. The monitor shows the amount of oxygen in the blood.

Test Results

If the test results show that your baby might have a heart problem, the doctor will talk with you and may order more tests.

Please talk with your doctor or nurse if you do not want your baby tested for serious heart defects.

When Should My Baby Be Tested?

Babies should be at least 24 hours old before receiving the pulse ox test. Finding heart problems early allows your baby to get treatment right away. For best results, your baby should be warm, quiet and calm during the test. We encourage you to talk with your nurse or doctor about any questions or concerns.



The pulse ox test may not find every heart problem.

After leaving our care, be sure to keep all medical appointments and take your baby to the doctor regularly.