

## NEWBORN SCREENING EXPANDS TO 19 TESTS

STAFF  
12/08/2006

The Texas Department of State Health Services has expanded screening to include 19 more disorders, following Legislature mandates.

DSHS is now testing "heel stick" blood samples from newborns for 26 disorders, with one more to be added early next year. Previously, newborns were screened for seven conditions.

"We are pleased to announce that the Newborn Screening Program expansion has begun and is now giving important clinical information to health care providers and families," said Dr. Charles Bell, DSHS acting commissioner. "Early detection of these disorders allows early treatment that can prevent serious complications such as growth problems, developmental delays, deafness or blindness, mental retardation, seizures or early death."

He said all babies born in Texas are required to have two rounds of screening tests for certain inheritable and other disorders. The Newborn Screening Program identifies those infants who have an abnormal screen at birth or shortly afterward. An abnormal laboratory result triggers follow-up and case management to contact the health care provider to take appropriate action.

House Bill 790, passed by the Texas Legislature in 2005, mandated DSHS screen for additional disorders recommended by the American College of Medical Genetics as funding allows.

DSHS receives about 760,000 newborn specimens annually.

Babies will continue to receive hearing screenings as well. The newborn test is simple, with a tiny amount of blood taken from the baby's heel about 24 to 48 hours after birth or before leaving the hospital. A second blood sample is taken one to two weeks later.

The blood sample is put on a piece of absorbent paper, dried and sent to the DSHS laboratory in Austin for special screening tests.

DSHS reports that most children born with these problems are from healthy families and appear healthy at birth. Parents who have already had healthy children do not expect any problems with birth defects. Because every baby is tested soon after birth, any child who may have a disorder can be identified early and get early care.

The health care provider or facility sending the specimen to the laboratory buys the specimen collection kit for private pay patients. DSHS provides specimen collection kits free to those covered by Medicaid and Title V.

Approximately \$3.1 million was appropriated for startup of the expansion, with \$900,000 a year appropriated for charity testing. Cost for testing is \$29.50.

©Tyler Morning Telegraph 2006