

Why check newborns for heart problems?

Only half of heart problems are identified before birth. Babies who look healthy at birth may still have heart problems. At BC Women's we check all babies for a group of heart problems called Critical Congenital Heart Diseases. This will help your doctor or midwife care for your baby sooner. These are heart problems that babies are born with. Congenital means the baby has it at birth. We are not sure what causes these heart problems.

When will my baby be checked?

This will be done before your baby leaves hospital, at 24 to 48 hours after birth.

How do we check for critical congenital heart problems?

A simple and painless test is done using a machine called a pulse oximeter to measure how much oxygen is in your baby's blood. It takes less than 5 minutes to get a reading. You may hold your baby during the test to help keep them warm and quiet. A nurse will attach a "sensor" on your baby's right hand and then on their foot. This sensor is attached to the machine. The machine measures the level of oxygen in your baby's blood.



Sensor attached to baby's right hand

What does this mean for my baby?

A baby could still have a heart problem, and we may not see it, however this test will find most heart problems. A normal result with this test means that the risk is very low that your baby has a heart problem.



Sensor attached to baby's foot

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

A low oxygen level means there might be a heart problem. More tests are needed.

A doctor or midwife will come check your baby. They will look for signs to explain why the oxygen level is low. A baby doctor (pediatrician) or a baby heart doctor (pediatric cardiologist) will be involved in your baby's care if needed.

Questions?

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