



# Congenital Heart Disease Screening Frequently Asked Questions

## What is pulse oximetry?

Pulse oximetry (ox-eh-meh-tree) is a simple and painless test that measures how much oxygen is in the blood. Another term for pulse oximetry is “pulse ox” or “sat.”

## How is the pulse-oximetry test performed?

A sticky strip, like a bandage, with a small red light (or probe) is placed on the baby’s hand or foot. The probe is attached to a wire, which is attached to a special monitor that shows the pulse-oximetry reading. The pulse-oximetry test takes just a few minutes to perform when a baby is still, quiet and warm. If a baby is crying, squirming or cold, it may take longer or not be possible. You can help comfort your baby while the test is being performed.

## Why is pulse oximetry conducted?

The pulse-oximetry test is routinely used to monitor an infant’s oxygen level during a procedure or treatment. It can also help to identify babies with serious heart conditions that may have low levels of oxygen in their blood.

A doctor or nurse practitioner may ask for more testing, such as an ultrasound of the heart or echocardiogram, when a low pulse-oximetry reading is identified. The echocardiogram will screen for a serious problem in the structure or blood flow of the heart. The pulse-oximetry test can identify a baby with serious congenital heart disease (CHD) before he or she leaves the newborn nursery.

**What is congenital heart disease (CHD)?**

CHD is a problem in the structure of the heart or the blood flow through the heart. CHD is the most common birth defect.

**Can the pulse-oximetry test hurt my child?**

The pulse-oximetry test is non-invasive and painless. It usually does not hurt the child.

**When will the pulse-oximetry test be performed?**

The pulse-oximetry test will be done after the baby is 24 hours old.

**What is a normal reading?**

Pulse-oximetry readings that are 95 to 100 percent are normal in healthy children. Children with heart or lung problems may have lower readings. A low pulse-oximetry reading can be normal in newborns whose lungs and heart are adjusting after birth. If your child has a problem with his or her heart or lungs, your doctor or nurse will tell you what a normal pulse-oximetry range is for your child. It is possible that your baby's doctor will order additional tests.

**Can a baby with serious CHD have a normal pulse-oximetry reading?**

It is possible that the pulse-oximetry test will not detect all forms of problems in the baby's heart. Your baby should continue to have normal visits with his or her primary care doctor. If a problem with the heart is suspected, your primary care doctor will advise you.

**What if I have questions or do not want to have my baby screened for serious heart problems?**

If you have questions about pulse ox or CHD, ask the doctor or nurse practitioner that is providing your prenatal care or the doctor or nurse caring for your baby after he or she is born. If you do not want your baby screened for serious heart problems, tell your doctor or nurse when you are in the hospital to deliver your baby.



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