

# Checking your baby's heart

## Checking your baby has a healthy heart

Every week, in New Zealand, around 12 babies are born with a congenital heart defect (CHD). This is where either the heart or blood flow through the heart is abnormal. A congenital heart defect can affect the way oxygen is carried around your baby's body and can cause your baby to become unwell very quickly. If a congenital heart defect is detected early then treatment can be provided to repair the defect.

## Pulse oximetry screening

All newborns are offered a test for congenital heart defects by measuring the oxygen level in their blood. Babies with heart defects often have low blood oxygen levels. Screening occurs between 2 and 24 hours of age.

Pulse oximetry screening is a quick, safe and painless test. A small sensor pad with a red light is placed around your baby's foot. The sensor is attached to a monitor that shows the oxygen level in your baby's blood. This screening takes just a few minutes while your baby is quiet, calm and warm. You can hold your baby while the screening is done.



## Pulse oximetry results

The test result is instant. If your baby has a normal oxygen level nothing further needs to be done.

A low reading can be normal, as sometimes babies take a little longer to adapt their circulation after birth. We will repeat the screening up to 2 times over the next 4 hours.

If repeated screening continues to show low oxygen levels a paediatrician (baby doctor) will examine your baby and discuss with you and your whānau other tests that may be needed.

It is important to know that pulse oximetry screening detects most heart defects but not all. Some other signs that may suggest a heart defect are:

- If your baby is breathing fast when they are resting or sleeping
- If your baby is sweating around the head
- If your baby has a bluish skin colour
- If your baby tires easily during feeds.

If you have any concerns regarding this test or in general about your baby, please talk to your midwife or doctor.