



USM Doping Control Centre research assistant Saw San (right) and senior science officer Hayati Muhamad Noh showing a newborn's blood sample being screened for metabolic disorders among newborn at its premises in Penang yesterday.

### **Simple test to check for 25 disorders in newborns**

By Audrey Dermawan

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GEORGE TOWN: The country's first metabolic screening service for newborns was unveiled yesterday by Universiti Sains Malaysia's Doping Control Centre (DCC) The service can detect about 25 disorders in four different categories — amino acid metabolism, urea cycle, organic acid and fatty acid oxidation.

All it takes is a single test, with results in fewer than three days. The test is most effective if carried out within 72 hours of a baby's birth and after the first proper milk feeding.

DCC director Professor Dr Aishah A. Latiff said with early detection, conditions such as mental retardation and severe disability could be promptly treated.

She said doctors had started analysing samples from newborns at Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia in Kubang Kerian, Kelantan.

"We hope all parents will send their newborns for a screening.

"The test has proven to be reliable and highly beneficial in most countries that have implemented it," she said at the centre here yesterday.

The Health Ministry revealed that there were 200 metabolism disorder cases among newborns in general hospitals in 2005 and the figure rose to 300 last year.

To date, no hospital in Malaysia offers such a comprehensive testing.

However, the Institute of Medical Research had, for the past 15 months, conducted a pilot study on a similar screening test. The two-year study ends in August.

Although such testing is not mandatory in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and a number of states in the US have made it compulsory for newborns to undergo such tests.

Aishah said DCC would make the test available to all private and public hospitals as well as clinics throughout the country. Each test costs RM85.

Elaborating on the service, Aishah said a few drops of blood would be placed on a filter paper and sent to a laboratory for testing using a highly sophisticated equipment.

The DCC has three such instruments, costing RM1.5 million each.

USM vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Dzulkifli Abdul Razak assured users of the service their confidentiality would not be compromised.