

State's newborn screening program expands testing

PIERRE, S.D. - Babies born in South Dakota will soon be routinely screened for more than 30 metabolic disorders that can result in slowed development, mental retardation or even death. State law currently mandates screening for just three disorders - phenylketonuria, galactosemia and congenital hypothyroidism - but the state's Newborn Metabolic Screening Program also offers screening for the other disorders on an optional basis.

Beginning June 1, South Dakota newborns will also be screened for biotinidase deficiency, congenital adrenal hyperplasia, hemoglobinopathies (sickle cell disease), amino acid disorders, fatty acid oxidation disorders, and organic acid disorders. Screening for cystic fibrosis will also be available on an optional basis.

"These disorders are uncommon but the cost of not diagnosing them, both in human suffering and financial impact, is immense. That's why we've chosen to make sure all South Dakota babies get these screenings," said Laurie Gill, Director of Health and Medical Services for the department.

Gill said metabolic diseases are disorders caused by the accumulation of chemicals produced naturally in the body. Because infants with these disorders typically show no obvious signs at birth, screening is necessary to detect them.

"If these disorders can be detected early and treatment provided, the likelihood of normal growth and development increases and the risk of illness and death is reduced," said Gill. "That's the reason it's so important these babies get screened before they leave the hospital."

The entire panel of tests can be done on a small sample of blood collected from the infant's heel. Typically, parents will only be contacted if a problem is found. While parents pay the cost of testing, it may be covered by some insurance plans. Testing is also covered by the South Dakota Medicaid program for those who are eligible.

More information about metabolic screening in South Dakota is available on the web at www.state.sd.us/doh/NewbornScreening or by calling 1-800-738-2301.