Newborn Pulse Oximetry Testing

What is pulse oximetry?

A pulse oximetry (pulse ox) test is used to check the oxygen level in your baby’s blood.

How is pulse ox done?

For this test, a small light (sensor) inside a soft bandage is wrapped around your baby’s right hand and foot. Light waves in the sensor measures the oxygen level in the blood.

When is the test done?

The pulse ox test is done when your baby is over 24 hours old and before discharge. Your nurse will do the test when your baby is resting quietly. This test usually takes only a few minutes, and does not cause any pain or discomfort.

Why is my baby having this test?

Pulse oximetry is a screening test that can help identify serious problems with your baby’s heart. These defects are called critical congenital heart defects (CCHD). Finding these problems early will help your doctor treat your baby right away if needed.

How will I get the results of the pulse ox test?

Your nurse will tell you the results after the test. If your baby does not pass the pulse ox test, your nurse will contact your baby’s doctor. The doctor will explain what added testing is needed. It is important to know many babies will not have CCHD after additional testing.

Pulse oximetry helps find most, but not all, heart defects. All babies should have regular check-ups with their doctor. Your doctor will talk with you if there are any concerns about heart problems.

For more information on CCHD, please go to:
http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/heartdefects/screening.html

If you have any questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.