



Newborn Screening Bulletin 2020-3

March 30, 2020

Precautions for handling DBS during COVID-19

There is no evidence of blood-borne transmission of the coronavirus and the risk involved in newborn screening sample collection and handling is minimal. We recommend that dried blood spot samples be collected and handled with the usual universal precautions.

Repeat collection for specimens collected prior to 24 hours of age

While certain diseases can be screened using a sample collected before 24 hours of age, screening for congenital hypothyroidism and many metabolic diseases (e.g. PKU, other amino acid disorders, urea cycle disorders, etc.) is unreliable. Due to the risk of missing an infant with one of these diseases, collection of a repeat specimen is strongly recommended. If parents are uncomfortable returning to the hospital to have the newborn screen repeated, they should call NSO or consult with their doctor to weigh the benefits and risks of having a repeat newborn screening sample collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage all submitters to identify ways to minimize the number of samples collected at <24 hours and to explore what extra precautions/safety measures could be considered to protect newborns returning for repeat specimen collection.

Changes to Risk Factor Screening for Permanent Hearing Loss (PHL)

In partnership with the Ontario Infant Hearing Program (IHP), NSO has been offering screening for congenital Cytomegalovirus (CMV) and common genetic risk factors associated with childhood permanent hearing loss (PHL) since July, 2019. This screening uses the same newborn dried blood spot (DBS) specimen that is collected for routine newborn screening. Consent for this screening is obtained by the IHP at the time of audiometric hearing screening and results are reported back to them.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and announcement this week that all non-essential services will be discontinued, the IHP is postponing all audiometric hearing screening and is no longer able to obtain consent for cCMV and genetic risk factor screening. After careful review with the Ontario Ministries of Health (MOH) and Children Community and Social Services (MCCSS), a decision has been made to nonetheless continue with the risk factor screening program. All specimens from babies born on or after March 26, 2020 will be screened for cCMV and genetic risk factors for PHL without the need for additional consent by the IHP. Physicians from NSO will serve as the ordering physicians for this screening and results will not be included on the NSO results report that you receive. Screen positive results will continue to be referred for medical and audiologic follow-up.

If you receive any questions from parents about risk factor screening for PHL, we ask that you please refer them to the NSO website or suggest they call NSO at 613-738-3222 x1045.

Requests for results

A reminder to only send urgent report requests at this time and to send them via the NSO website using the online form found [here](#). Please do not send us non-urgent report requests, and discontinue sending requests by fax.

