

Happy mothers and babies day: Ontario funds two more tests for Newborn Screening Ontario

May 12, 2017—OTTAWA— Imagine being able to save a baby's life by detecting a critical heart problem with a quick and painless test done at the bedside just after birth. In 2017, Ontario will be the first jurisdiction in Canada to offer province-wide screening of all babies for critical congenital heart disease thanks to funding from the Ontario government. Funding is also being provided to connect Newborn Screening Ontario and Ontario's Infant Hearing Program to enhance newborn hearing screening in the province.

"I'm happy to announce funding to further strengthen newborn screening for all Ontario babies, and we are proud to be the first province in Canada to screen for critical congenital heart disease," says local MPP John Fraser, who is also Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. "Our government is committed to early detection and intervention that improves health and developmental outcomes, so children can lead healthy and happy lives."

The new screens, funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, will be coordinated and implemented by Newborn Screening Ontario (NSO), a leader in newborn screening in Canada based at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO). NSO will be working closely with the Ontario Infant Hearing Program, funded by the Ministry of Child and Youth Services, to enhance the newborn hearing screen.

"We are so proud of the great work done by Newborn Screening Ontario here at CHEO. Their dedicated staff and innovative clinicians help every single baby born in Ontario get the healthiest possible start in life," says Alex Munter, CEO of CHEO and the Ottawa Children's Treatment Centre.

Critical congenital heart disease (CCHD) affects about three babies in 1,000 and can cause severe health issues or death. It occurs when a baby's heart or major blood vessels have not formed properly. If detected early, cardiac surgery or non-surgical interventions can correct the disorder, allowing babies to grow and develop normally.

Approximately 400 to 450 babies are born with CCHD every year in Ontario. Although many cases of CCHD are detected before birth with ultrasound or immediately after birth, up to 30% of cases are missed. A handful of these babies die each year. This new screening test is estimated to identify the between 50 and 100 babies with CCHD who are not picked up with other methods.

Screening for CCHD, performed at the bedside by a nurse or midwife using a hand-held device that painlessly measures blood oxygen levels, will provide immediate results leading to rapid follow up. Screening is being rolled out in stages across the province. Some hospitals and midwives began screening early in 2017 and, by January 2018, all newborns in Ontario will be screened at birth for CCHD.

"With this simple screen, we will be able to save lives, prevent unnecessary suffering and improve outcomes for these babies whose condition would have previously been missed," says Dr. Pranesh Chakraborty, Director of Newborn Screening Ontario and a clinical investigator at the CHEO Research Institute. "We are grateful to the Government of Ontario for funding the procedure to make this screening available for every baby born in Ontario. Newborn screening can provide life-saving treatment for treatable conditions like CCHD if detected early."

Additional information about the CCHD screen is available at www.newbornscreening.on.ca/en/news

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About NSO

Newborn Screening Ontario (NSO) has tested over 1.5 million newborns for rare diseases that are treatable. Since NSO started at CHEO in 2006, approximately 2,000 babies with these diseases have been diagnosed through newborn screening. NSO is the most comprehensive newborn screening program in Canada, and is one of the largest and most modern programs in the world.

About CHEO – OCTC

The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario – Ottawa Children's Treatment Centre (CHEO – OCTC) is the leading provider of specialized pediatric health services in Canada's capital. The two previously separate organizations joined forces in 2016 to become one organization — stronger together for kids and families.

CHEO's programs help more than 500,000 children and youth each year in Eastern Ontario, Western Quebec, Nunavut and parts of Northern Ontario. As a world-class research centre and teaching hospital, for over 40 years CHEO has changed young lives in our community, while our innovations change young lives around the world.

For more than 65 years, OCTC has been providing specialized care for children and youth with disabilities, including cerebral palsy, complex needs associated with congenital conditions, developmental delay, autism spectrum disorders and brain injury. OCTC's vision is to create opportunities today, while maximizing independence tomorrow.

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