

A few routine tests and procedures are offered for your newborn the first few days after birth while in hospital.

Erythromycin Eye Ointment

Eye infections caused by gonorrhea or chlamydia (sexually transmitted infections/STIs), carry the risk of causing blindness.

You will be tested by your maternity care provider during your pregnancy for STIs. If you do have an STI, you can be treated before the baby is born, reducing the risk of passing along the infection to your baby.

Erythromycin antibiotic eye ointment is given to all babies within an hour of birth to protect them against eye infections caused by STIs. With your verbal consent, it is given by placing a small amount of eye ointment into your baby's lower eyelid.

Vitamin K

Vitamin K helps your baby's blood to clot and prevents bleeding in your baby's brain and other areas. A single injection (shot- in the babies thigh) of Vitamin K is recommended for all babies in their first six hours of life, as newborns have low amounts of this vitamin at birth.

Newborn Metabolic Screening

The newborn screening test is a blood test to screen for 24 rare but treatable conditions.

Screening babies at birth allows for early identification, care and management of these conditions, and if treated early, can prevent more severe health problems. The test is usually done about 24 hours after birth, or before hospital discharge.

- For this test, your baby's heel is pricked to get a small amount of blood which is spotted onto a card. The lab tests your baby's blood spot card for all 24 conditions at the same time. If your baby's screening result is negative, the chance that your baby has one of these disorders is very low.
- If your baby's screening result is positive, your baby will need to have more tests to find out for sure. A positive screening result does not mean that your baby has one of these disorders, but it is possible.

Jaundice

Newborn jaundice is common in 50% of full-term babies and typically shows up 2-4 days after birth. Jaundice occurs as levels of a yellow pigment called bilirubin rise naturally in the first few days of life. Bilirubin is a yellow substance created when the body breaks down old red blood cells. A newborn's liver may take time to be able to remove bilirubin from the body (during pregnancy the bilirubin was removed by the placenta). Most of the time it goes away within 2 weeks; if bilirubin levels are high however, sometimes jaundice may need to be treated.

The Bilirubin screening is a recommended light that goes on the baby's chest at 24 hours old. If that screening test is high a blood test to confirm bilirubin levels should be completed.

Treatment is done using phototherapy, where your baby is placed under a special blue light.

The light helps your baby's liver to break down bilirubin.

Newborn Hearing Screen

All babies in BC have their hearing checked soon after birth. A small number of babies are born with hearing loss which can affect their speech and language skills. Without checking, there are no obvious signs to tell early on if a baby has hearing loss.

The newborn hearing screening plays soft sounds into your baby's ears while a computer measures the ears' reactions. The test is safe and doesn't hurt your baby. It is usually done in your hospital room but, if you go home early, can also be done at a community clinic.

You will be given the results as soon as the test is done. Some babies need to have a second screening to get a clear answer. This does not mean that your baby has hearing loss.

Screening for Critical congenital Heart Defects

Sometimes babies are born with major heart problems that were not found during pregnancy. These heart problems lead to low levels of oxygen in a newborn's blood and may be identified using a simple bedside test called a pulse oximetry screening. A device is placed on the baby's hand to look at the level of oxygen in the blood. The test is repeated on the baby's foot and the two numbers are compared to each other. They should be within 3% of each other to indicate a normal test result.

Low levels of oxygen in the blood can be a sign of critical congenital heart defect (CCHD).

The test is usually done at least 24 hours after birth. It is painless and takes only a few minutes.