



GUIDELINE

Pulse Oximetry Screening to Detect Critical Congenital Heart Disease

Scope (Staff):	Nursing and Medical Staff
Scope (Area):	NICU KEMH, NICU PCH, NETS WA, KEMH Postnatal Wards

Child Safe Organisation Statement of Commitment

CAHS commits to being a child safe organisation by applying the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. This is a commitment to a strong culture supported by robust policies and procedures to reduce the likelihood of harm to children and young people.

This document should be read in conjunction with this [disclaimer](#)

Aim

Outline the timing and importance of pulse oximetry screening for detect for critical congenital heart disease in the newborn in the postnatal wards and within the neonatal unit.

Risk

Failure to monitor and detect abnormalities can result in delay treatment or result in poor health outcomes for the newborn. Delayed diagnosis can be associated with increased mortality and morbidity from multi-organ damage.

Background

Critical congenital heart disease can be diagnosed by fetal ultrasound, however around 50% will still be missed. Babies may lack clinical signs in the first day of life, appearing pink despite a “cyanotic” heart lesion, with lack of murmur and apparently palpable femoral pulses in coarctations. A UK study estimated that 25% of babies with congenital cyanotic heart disease are not diagnosed until after discharge from the nursery. At least 3 babies have been identified at KEMH over 8 years who were discharged with a critical congenital heart lesion undetected prior to screening.

There is a significant amount of data to suggest that routine use of pulse oximetry before discharge will diagnose a substantial proportion of babies who would have otherwise been missed by routine examination (~ 50%). The data is all from observational studies.

This MEANS for every 1000 babies screened about 7 cases need further evaluation with 1 in 5 of those having a critical heart lesion.

Timing of the screening is important, if done after 24 hours the screening outcomes were improved to a positive predictive value of 47%.

Key points

- Pulse oximetry can detect some critical congenital heart disease that would otherwise be missed on routine examination / antenatal USS.
- The ideal time for oximetry is around 24 hours of age.
- Babies admitted to SCN should have this performed if >35 weeks GA
- The probe should be sited on the lower limb.
- $\geq 95\%$ plus difference between right hand and either foot ≤ 3 is considered normal and a baby can then be discharged as normal.
- Verbal consent should be obtained and the screen documented in the notes on the Neonatal History MR410 form below day 1 check.

Screening Process

Postnatal Wards

An *appropriately prepared health professional to screen all neonates born at KEMH prior to discharge (ideally at around 24 hours of age, but for early discharge within 1 hour of discharge) with right hand and lower limb O₂ saturations.

- Note: *An appropriately prepared health professional* is either a paediatric medical officer or a midwife who has successfully undertaken the Full Physical examination of the Newborn (FPEON).

The screening should occur around the time of the discharge review. Take the highest number the trace gets to as the screening number (the probe only needs to only on until a good steady trace is obtained which may take < 1 minute). The baby should not be feeding and should be settled.

Neonatal Unit

The screening should ideally occur at 24 hours. The oximetry saturation needs to be done on right hand and either lower limb. Take the highest number the trace gets to as the screening number (the probe only needs to only on until a good steady trace is obtained which may take < 1 minute). The baby should not be feeding and should be settled.

For all newborns:

Normal is $\geq 95\%$ oxygen saturation

AND

The difference between right hand and lower limb $\leq 3\%$

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- If O₂ saturations 91 – 94% → medical review to consider other causes (mainly sepsis). If well with a normal examination → repeat screening test in 1-2hours when baby settled.
- If still abnormal after 2 tests → for a senior review (SR or Consultant Neonatologist) and refer to cardiology as necessary.
- If O₂ saturations <90% → admit to SCN immediately and for senior review and continuous oximetry monitoring. Other causes need to be excluded (with possible septic work up and IV antibiotics, CXR and assessment. Other problems – upper airway, neurological, polycythaemia, persistent pulmonary hypertension). Studies show up to 50% of babies screening positive have signs of sepsis on further evaluation².
 - For infants already admitted to SCN, escalate concerns to Senior Registrar or consultant.
- If no other cause found echocardiogram to be performed at time dictated by Cardiologist (may be next day but prior to discharge).
- Refer to Appendix 1 for Quick Reference Guide

Documentation

- The outcome of screening should be documented on the neonatal examination form Neonatal History MR410.
- Any abnormal screening should also be documented in the inpatient history with the medical review.

References and related external legislation, policies, and guidelines

1. Brown KL, Ridout DA, Hoskote A. et al. Delayed diagnosis of congenital heart disease worsens preoperative condition and outcome of surgery in neonates. *Heart* 2006;92:1298-1302
2. Mahle AT, Newburger JW, Paul Matherne G et al. Role of pulse oximetry in examining newborns for congenital heart disease: a scientific statement from the AHA and AAP. *Pediatrics* 2009;124: 823-836
3. Tautz J, Merkel C, Loersch F et al. Implication of pulse oximetry screening for detection of congenital heart defects. *Klin Padiatr* 2010; 222(5):291-5
4. Riede FT, Worner C, Dahnert I et al. Effectiveness of neonatal pulse oximetry screening for detection of critical congenital heart disease in daily clinical routine- results from a prospective multicenter study. *Eur J Pediatr* 2010; 169: 975-981
5. De Whal Granelli A, Wennergren M et al. Impact of pulse oximetry screening on the detection of duct dependent congenital heart disease: a Swedish prospective screening study in 39 821 newborns. *BMJ* 2009;338:a3037
6. Walsh W. Evaluation of pulse oximetry screening in Middle Tennessee: cases for consideration before universal screening. *J Perinat* 2011; 31, 125-129
7. Ewer EK, Middleton LJ et al. Pulse oximetry screening for congenital heart defects in newborn infants (Pulseox): A test accuracy study. *Lancet* 2011; 378(785-794)

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8. Royal North Shore Sydney Hospital guidelines
9. Swiss National guideline: Kuelling B, Arlettaz Mieth R, Bauersfeld U, Balmer C. Pulse oximetry screening for congenital heart defects in Switzerland: most but not all maternity units screen their neonates. *Swiss Med Wkly* 2009 Nov 28;139(47-48):699-704
10. Ewer EK Screening for Critical Congenital Heart Defects with Pulse Oximetry: Medical Aspects. *Amer J Perinatol* 2016; 33(11): 1062-1066

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Document Owner:	Neonatology		
Reviewer / Team:	Neonatology		
Date First Issued:	July 2012	Last Reviewed:	December 2021
Amendment Dates:		Next Review Date:	25 th January 2025
Approved by:	Neonatology Coordinating Group	Date:	25 th January 2022
Endorsed by:	Neonatology Coordinating Group	Date:	
Standards Applicable:	NSQHS Standards: Child Safe Standards: 1,10		

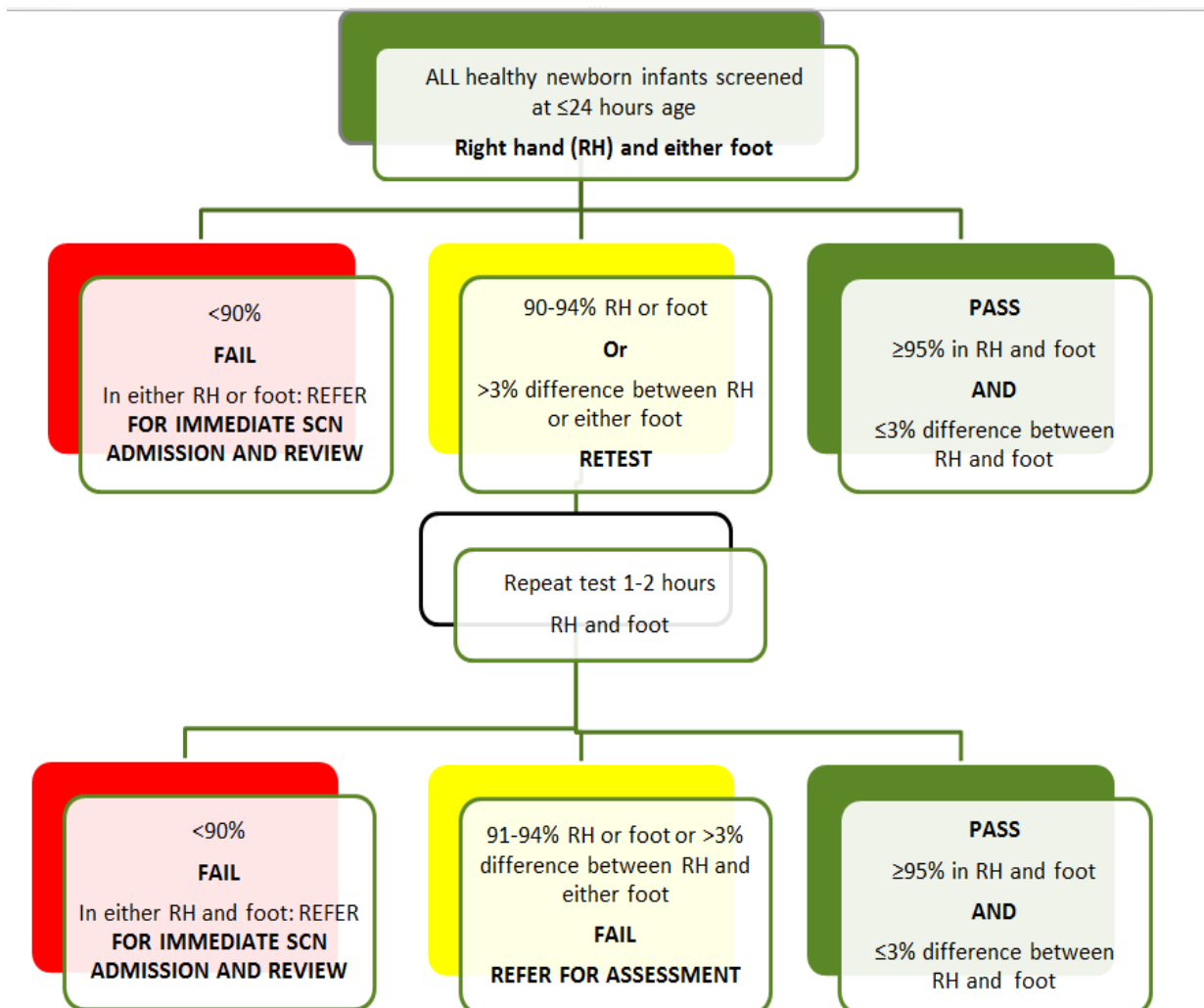
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Healthy kids, healthy communities

Compassion
Excellence
Collaboration
Accountability
Equity
Respect

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Appendix 1: Postnatal Wards Quick Reference



Appendix 2: Further information

Many studies have shown that babies with serious, potentially life-threatening, non-cardiac, hypoxemic condition, such as respiratory or infective disorders, are also identified by POS. These babies are usually classified as false positives, but it is generally accepted that early detection of these babies, before they become unwell, is a potential advantage and the label of false positive is perhaps a misnomer.

The majority of the data comes from screening lower limb at $\geq 95\%$ cut off. Some studies have also included a measurement of the difference between upper and lower limb (to rule out coarctation of the aorta). Certainly coarctation of the aorta remains a diagnostic challenge and in the studies reviewed by AAP this is the cardiac lesion least likely to be found with the oximetry screening test.

After a Western Australian audit of cases in 2018 with only 4% being diagnosed statewide on oximetry screening a decision was made to include the difference between pre and post ductal (right hand and foot) saturations with >3 being considered abnormal and if on repeat consistently different should also warrant echocardiography. This is now standard in most international guidelines (America, Canada and Europe) although some use a difference >2 not 3. The aim is to diagnose more left obstructed lesions (including coarctation of the aorta) prior to discharge.