



Media Release

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Arkansas Expanding Screening of Newborn Babies for 29 Treatable Conditions

(Little Rock--) On July 1st, Arkansas will expand screening of newborn babies to include 29 rare conditions that can be harmful—even fatal—to babies. Today, at a press conference at the March of Dimes, leaders in the public health and health care arenas talked about the expansion of the Arkansas Newborn Screening Program. Newborn screenings are tests that look for uncommon genetic disorders in newborn babies. These screens are important because they can help doctors treat conditions that, if not treated early, could result in life-long health problems, mental retardation, or even death. Prior to July 1st, Arkansas screened for seven conditions, including Phenylketouria (PKU), Galactosemia, Sickle Cell Anemia, Congenital Hypothyroidism, and hearing loss.

The testing is simple. Health care providers collect a few drops of blood from a small heel-prick from babies and send the blood to the ADH Newborn Screening Laboratory for testing. There is no risk to babies except maybe some bruising or soreness on the skin from the heel-prick. Most likely, the test results will be normal. If the result is not normal, the baby will need more tests; however, a single positive result does not necessarily mean that a baby has a condition. It only means that a baby *might* have a disorder. Further testing is necessary to make sure. The final test which diagnoses the infant may be billed to the family's insurance plan. If the baby does have one of the disorders, early treatment is necessary to ensure the best health of the baby.

Dr. Paul Halverson, Arkansas Department of Health Director and State Health Officer, said, "If this program makes it easier for just one Arkansas baby to have a healthier start in life, it will be a resounding success. I am so proud of the partnerships and hard work that our state's hospitals, the March of Dimes, staff at the Health Department and others in the health care field have done over the last several years to make this dream a reality."

"This is an important addition of medical technology to the portfolio of care we offer to new parents in the state. While we hope no family has to face any of these conditions, knowing early and responding promptly will help us optimize care." Joseph W. Thompson, MD, MPH

"This is a good day for Arkansas—a victory for our youngest citizens and for parents to know their newborns are healthy," said Dr. Terrance Zuerlein, State Board Chair of the March of

Dimes Arkansas Chapter. "Newborn screening is an essential public health responsibility and an important service to all families."

Nurses and other medical care providers in hospitals are being educated about the changes in screenings. They are being trained in handling of samples and how to answer questions from parents about the new testing. Paul Cunningham, Senior Vice President, Arkansas Hospital Association, said, "Arkansas hospital leaders are very supportive of the expanded newborn screening efforts. As healthcare professionals, they know that identifying health disorders so they can effectively be treated early in life is a gateway to healthier populations 10 or 20 years in the future. As parents, they know that this more complete screening regimen may help add years to the lives of many Arkansas children, maybe even their own, and also should add to the quality of those lives as well."

On October 26, 2006, the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) received approval from the Arkansas Board of Health to move forward with plans for expansion of the State's Newborn Screening Program. The ADH obtained legislative approval in the Spring 2007. On November 1, 2007, the Board of Health approved the revised Rules and Regulations Pertaining to Testing of Newborn Infants, and these Rules and Regulations will become effective July 1, 2008 at which time the ADH will expand testing to include 29 treatable disorders. This expansion will align Arkansas's Newborn Screening Program with the current national recommendations.

For a list of the specific conditions and other information about Newborn Screenings in Arkansas, visit www.healthyarkansas.com/newbornscreenings or www.marchofdimes.com/nbs.

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