



**Kentucky Public Health**

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## **Screening Kentucky Babies for Heart Defects** *52 Weeks of Public Health Spotlight: Congenital Heart Defects Month*



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**FRANKFORT, Ky. (February 14, 2018)-** As a part of the 52 Weeks of Public Health, the Department for Public Health (DPH) is raising awareness about the benefits of screening to detect heart defects in Kentucky babies.

February is congenital heart defects month. Each year, approximately 105 babies in Kentucky and about 7,200 babies in the United States are born with a critical congenital heart defects. A Congenital Heart Defect (CHD) is a birth defect that affects the structure of a baby's heart and the way it works. CHDs are the most common birth defect, with about 1 case in every 100 babies.

Research suggests that a mix of genetic and environmental factors cause heart defects. There is no known way to prevent all CHDs, but doctors recommend that women who are pregnant stay at a healthy weight, eat well, take prenatal vitamins, and avoiding smoking or drinking.

CCHDs can cause serious, life-threatening symptoms, but are often treatable if caught early. In Kentucky, newborn babies are screened for CHDs through a simple test called Pulse Oximetry, a simple bedside test to determine the amount of oxygen in a baby's blood and the baby's pulse rate. This painless, quick test can help identify congenital heart defects in babies that look and seem healthy at birth.

“By doing this simple test, potential life-threatening heart defects can be identified early in a seemingly healthy newborn baby. It is important to find these defects immediately so that treatment can begin,” said Dr. Henrietta Bada, Director of the Division of Maternal Child Health.

Kentucky began CCHD screening as a part of the newborn screening in January 2014. Without screening by a pulse oximetry reading, some babies born with a congenital heart defect can appear healthy at first and be sent home with their families before their heart defect is detected. All hospitals in Kentucky are monitored daily to assure all babies have had their newborn screenings before they are discharged.