

# The Newborn Blood Spot Test (Heel Prick)

Welcoming a new baby is a joyous occasion, filled with hopes and dreams for the future. Among the many responsibilities new parents face, ensuring the health and well-being of their newborn is paramount. One crucial step in this journey is the Newborn Blood Spot Screening, commonly known as the "heel prick test."

## Why is the Heel Prick Test Important?

The heel prick test is a type of screening conducted to detect rare but serious health conditions in newborns. By taking a small blood sample from your baby's heel just days after birth, healthcare providers can identify conditions early, often before any symptoms appear. This early detection is crucial because it allows for timely treatment that can prevent severe illness, disability, or even death.

## What Conditions Does the Test Screen For?

In the UK, the test screens for nine different conditions as part of the NHS Blood Spot Programme, while in the Republic of Ireland, it screens for nine conditions under the HSE Newborn Screening Programme. The table below shows the different conditions that the newborn blood spot test screens for both in the UK and ROI.

Condition	UK	Republic of Ireland
Sickle Cell Disease (SCD)	✓	

Cystic Fibrosis (CF)	✓	✓
Congenital Hypothyroidism (CHT)	✓	✓
Phenylketonuria (PKU)	✓	✓
Medium-chain acyl-CoA dehydrogenase deficiency (MCADD)	✓	✓
Maple Syrup Urine Disease (MSUD)	✓	✓
Isovaleric Acidaemia (IVA)	✓	
Glutaric Aciduria Type 1 (GA1)	✓	✓
Homocystinuria (HCU)	✓	✓
Classical Galactosaemia		✓
Adenosine Deaminase Deficiency Severe Combined		✓

Immunodeficiency (ADA-SCID)		
-----------------------------	--	--

### **How is the Test Conducted?**

The test is usually performed on the fifth day of life, either at home or in a hospital setting. A healthcare provider will gently prick your baby's heel, using a small device pictured below, to collect blood drops on a special card. This may cause brief discomfort, and in some cases infection and damage to blood vessels or nerves, although this is rare.



### **Understanding the Results**

In the UK, normal results are typically received by 6 to 8 weeks of age by post, while in the Republic of Ireland, results are sent to your GP or hospital by 6 weeks. If any condition is suspected, parents are promptly contacted by healthcare professionals.

### **Is Participation Mandatory?**

While the test is strongly recommended in both the UK and the Republic of Ireland, participation is not mandatory. Parents can choose to opt out, but it's crucial to make an informed decision. Discuss any concerns with your midwife or public health nurse to understand the implications fully.

### **Empower Your Choices**

The heel prick test is more than just a routine check—it's a proactive step in safeguarding your baby's future health. For more information, UK parents can visit [www.nhs.uk/bloodspot](http://www.nhs.uk/bloodspot)

and Irish parents can explore [www.hse.ie/newbornscreening](http://www.hse.ie/newbornscreening). Remember, early testing is a powerful tool in protecting your baby's future.