



The California Prenatal Screening Program

California Department of Public Health

Genetic Disease Screening Program



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California Prenatal Screening Program: Now Includes Prenatal Integrated Screening for Women in California

In March 2009, the California Department of Public Health's Prenatal Screening Program will roll out a program expansion that includes first trimester blood tests and Nuchal Translucency (NT) results. California is the largest state prenatal screening program to offer integrated screening. This enhancement significantly improves accuracy and detection rates for certain birth defects when first and second trimester test results are analyzed together.

"While I don't underestimate the challenges we will encounter during the transition phase, the advent of the new State program ultimately will simplify the menu of options available to California women," says Dr. Bruce Blumberg, a medical geneticist and former Kaiser Permanente Prenatal Diagnostic Center Chief. "The new algorithms will be flexible enough to accommodate, within a single program and with a single set of order forms, virtually all women, whether they are early or late to care, whether they have access to an NT ultrasound or not, and whether they prioritize an early result or a high detection rate."

The components of the new California Prenatal Screening Program include:

- (1) **Quad Marker Screening** (Second Trimester): One blood specimen drawn between 15 weeks and 20 weeks of pregnancy.
- (2) **Serum Integrated Screening**: Combines first trimester blood test results with second trimester blood test results.
- (3) **Full Integrated Screening**: Combines NT ultrasound results with first and second trimester blood test results. The Program does not pay for the NT ultrasound, but uses the NT results, when provided.

First Trimester Preliminary Risk Assessment: Patients with first trimester blood specimens and NT will receive a preliminary risk assessment for chromosomal abnormalities in the first trimester, refined when the second trimester blood specimen is received.

The new program is also cost effective for California residents and their insurers, with one flat rate (\$162) that includes the initial blood test(s) for screening and any authorized follow-up services. The program offers follow-up services at State-approved Prenatal Diagnostic Centers for women with screen positive results in the first or second trimesters. "The expansion of our prenatal screening program represents a significant advance toward improving birth outcomes," explains Dr. Mark B. Horton, Director of the California Department of Public Health. "California women will now have access to a single unified and cost effective program to provide them comprehensive prenatal screening services."

In conjunction with the new program, the State of California is increasing access to services, with Medi-Cal recipients now eligible for coverage of the NT ultrasound procedure. Medi-Cal is expected to pay for NT ultrasounds performed by credentialed practitioners.

To increase awareness of and participation in the California Prenatal Screening Program for physicians and other providers, the program is conducting multiple outreach activities, including in-services for physician groups and office staff, a series of Regional Forums on the scientific foundations of the new program, and the distribution of educational program materials on the scope of the expansion and changes to protocol.

For further information, please visit the Prenatal Screening Program website at <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/pns>.

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