

Parental Refusals: Key Information for Healthcare Providers

September 2026

Why Newborn Blood Spot Screening Matters

- **Early detection saves lives.** Screening identifies serious but treatable conditions before symptoms appear.
- **Timely intervention prevents harm.** Many screened conditions can cause severe disability or death if untreated.
- **Safe and simple.** A few drops of blood from the infant's heel provides critical health information.

What You Should Know

- **Parental refusals are increasing across Alberta**, often due to misinformation, concerns about pain, privacy or misunderstanding of the test's purpose.
- **Parents may overestimate risks and underestimate benefits.** Clear, empathetic communication can correct misconceptions.
- **Your role is pivotal.** Family physicians are among the most trusted sources of information for new and expecting parents and can significantly influence informed decision making.



Best Times to Discuss Screening with Parents

Prenatal visits are the most effective time to discuss newborn blood spot screening. Early conversations allow parents to:

- Understand the purpose and benefits before the stress of delivery.
- Ask questions and clarify misconceptions.
- Make informed decisions without time pressure.

Key touchpoints:

- **During routine prenatal care:** during the second and/or third trimester.
- **After screening:** review results with the family and discuss next steps as appropriate.
- **When no screen results:** ensure you follow-up with the family.

How to Approach the Conversation

- **Lead with purpose:** Emphasize that screening detects rare but serious conditions that are not visible at birth. Early detection saves lives and prevents irreversible harm.
- **Address myths:** Explain that the test is safe, minimally invasive and confidential. Mention that these conditions can happen even if there is no family history, including among their other children.
- **Acknowledge emotions:** Validate concerns while offering factual reassurance.
- **Highlight parental choice:** Screening is voluntary; however, refusal carries significant health risk.
- **Use clear, non-technical language:** Use simple language and emphasize outcomes parents value, such as safety, health and long-term wellbeing.
- **Provide resources:** Share Alberta Newborn Screening Program resources and credible websites.

Where do I find more information?

For the most up-to-date information on newborn blood spot screening visit primarycarealberta.ca/newbornscreening

- Select Alberta Newborn Screening Program (ANSP)
- Click 'Information for healthcare providers' for resources to support conversations with parents about results, as well as specimen collection resources, including policies, procedures, tools, staff education materials, and ordering information.
- Click on 'Information for parents' for parent resources and [parent condition information sheets](#).



Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact ANSP at newbornscreening@primarycarealberta.ca

For non-urgent questions about screened conditions, please contact the Genetic Counsellors at NBSGeneticCounsellors@albertaprecisionlabs.ca

For urgent inquiries, please contact the Genetic Counsellors by phone at 780-407-7907