



April 4, 2019

Dear Hospital Administrator/CEO:

Every baby born in Texas is screened for 53 disorders that can cause lifelong, debilitating conditions, and in some cases sudden or early death. Thankfully, Texas' Newborn Screening (NBS) program quickly detects these disorders, allowing for immediate interventions that save the lives of our most precious Texans. On average, the NBS program identifies 900 cases each year. That's about one case for every 400 babies.

Any delay in collecting or receiving a specimen has the potential to put a newborn's life at risk. Therefore, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the Texas Hospital Association (THA) are jointly **asking for your help to improve timeliness**. Our goal is to receive 60 percent of specimens within 24 hours of collection by a hospital or birthing facility. Currently, the rate is 25 percent.

Recently, we identified some best practices to improve timeliness and proper specimen submission. We're asking you to **implement these best practices** at your facility, as follows:

- ✓ Review internal processes to identify areas that may cause delays.
- ✓ Collect specimens between 24 and 48 hours of age (the sooner the better).
- ✓ Collect specimens at least 4-5 hours before a scheduled courier pick-up to allow for ample drying time.
- ✓ Use overnight shipping whenever available; don't wait until the next day.
- ✓ Assign the following tasks to specific staff members for each day of the week:
 - Gather specimens 1 hour before a scheduled courier pickup.
 - Check specimen quality and demographic information for accuracy and legibility.
 - Verify collection of all orders and perform follow-up on pending orders.
 - Ensure all dried specimens are included in the next available shipment.
 - Ensure courier documentation is correct and complete.
- ✓ Use the monthly report card to assess and monitor your specimen transit times.

- ✓ Lastly, if you need assistance, contact the DSHS Laboratory at 1-888-963-7111 ext. 7585 or NewbornScreeningLab@dshs.texas.gov.

Please share this letter with areas and staff directly involved in specimen collection and handling, including Risk Management, Quality Improvement, Newborn Screening Coordinator, Nurse Administrator, Laboratory Manager or Director, and others. And raise awareness among staff about DSHS's [educational materials](#) and [facility report cards](#).

Five years ago when we asked for help in improving Texas' NBS program, facilities across the state stepped up. As a result, we saw a dramatic reduction in delays. We sincerely thank you for your help then, and are confident we can count on you again to make NBS in Texas even more time-responsive.

If you need any assistance in fulfilling our request, please do not hesitate to contact Rachel Lee, Ph.D., DSHS Laboratory Biochemistry and Genetics Branch Manager, at (512) 776-7158 or Rachel.Lee@dshs.texas.gov.

Together, we can help give Texas babies their best chance for a healthy life.

Sincerely,



John Hellerstedt, M.D.
Commissioner



Ted Shaw
President/CEO
Texas Hospital Association