



Press Release | Medicine | Heart Research | Early Detection

Evaluation of Pulse Oximetry Screening Started

National Registry surveys parents on behalf of the G-BA

Berlin, March 31, 2021 - Critical congenital heart defects are among the leading causes of infant mortality in Germany. They require rapid treatment after birth. Pulse oximetry screening, introduced in 2017, closes a sensitive diagnostic gap. But how well is this early detection method working across the country?



Early detection of critical congenital heart defects: A small device with a light sensor on the foot measures oxygen levels in the blood. © Nationales Register | iStockphoto.com, manonallard

On behalf of the Federal Joint Committee (G-BA), the National Registry for Congenital Heart Defects will evaluate the quality and results of pulse oximetry screening starting in April 2021. Special attention is given to the early detection of critical congenital heart defects in newborns.

Since January 2017, pulse oximetry screening has been one of the voluntary routine examinations for newborns financed by health insurance. A light sensor on the foot painlessly measures the oxygen content of the blood. This enables the early detection of life-threatening congenital heart defects that were not detected during pregnancy and the examination immediately after birth.

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"We Need More Clarity"

Pulse oximetry screening is only performed with parental consent as part of the postnatal check-ups. According to Prof. Dr. Nikolaus Haas, President of the German Society for Pediatric Cardiology and Congenital Heart Defects (DGPK), a systematic evaluation is therefore important: "We urgently need more clarity about how the offer is accepted and how it works in practice. After all, every tenth congenital heart defect is critical. Only its timely treatment and correction can ensure the survival and quality of life of those affected," says the pediatric cardiologist. Ulrike Bauer, principal investigator and scientific director of the National Registry for Congenital Heart Defects, also emphasizes that the effectiveness of early detection depends on broad acceptance and widespread use of this screening method. "Critical heart defects are still being overlooked in the diagnostic process. That is why we are taking a multi-pronged approach to evaluation.

Multipronged Review Includes Parent Survey

The National Registry is reviewing pulse oximetry screening in randomly selected clinical and out-of-hospital birth settings for approximately 55,000 births. At the same time, data will be collected for one year on all infants born in Germany with a critical congenital heart defect after April 1, 2021, and treatment data on catheterization and surgery will be evaluated. Health insurance and care data from Barmer GEK are also included. A survey of parents of 7,000 selected participants in the National Registry for Congenital Heart Defects will provide additional evidence of the benefit of the procedure. This is also in the interest of the patient associations: "Today, even a critical heart defect does not have to be an obstacle to a full life. However, it is crucial that parents, midwives, and physicians are aware of the benefits of pulse oximetry screening. It can save lives," says Hermine Nock, Managing Director of the German Heart Association for Children with Heart Disease (BVHK).

Reader Service:

Do you or your child have a congenital heart defect? By joining the National Registry for Congenital Heart Defects, you can help advance medical science. You will also receive important information about current research projects



and support services. Learn more at www.herzregister.de. Membership is free and can be cancelled at any time.

<https://www.kompetenznetz-ahf.de/patienten/service-fuer-patienten/am-register-teilnehmen/>

For your research:

See also the Federal Joint Committee G-BA press release.

<https://www.g-ba.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/845/>

Press Contact

Competence Network for Congenital Heart Defects e.V.

Science Communication

Karin Lange

Augustenburger Platz 1

13353 Berlin

Phone:+49 30 45937277

Mobile:+49 175 2604260

Email: presse@kompetenznetz-ahf.de

More Press Information: <https://www.kompetenznetz-ahf.de/wir/presse/>

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