NEWS RELEASE
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Alabama Newborn Screening to add test for cystic fibrosis

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health in partnership with the cystic fibrosis centers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Children's Hospital of Alabama and the University of South Alabama announces further significant expansion of Alabama's newborn screening program. On April 21, Alabama will add cystic fibrosis to its panel of primary newborn screening tests. With this addition, Alabama further establishes itself as one of the leading newborn screening programs in America. This new test is the eighth addition to the Alabama screening panel since April 2007.

Newborn screening is a series of blood and hearing tests which are mandated by Alabama state law and Board of Health rule. These tests are administered within the first few days of an infant's life and target up to 29 primary and approximately 20 secondary disorders. Although relatively rare, the consequences of these largely unseen and hard-to-find disorders can be devastating.

Without the early detection provided by newborn screening these disorders might profoundly and permanently affect an infant. Untreated, some disorders may result in severe mental retardation or even death. The earlier these disorders are found the better the chances for a cure or at least the reduction of their severity.

Cystic fibrosis is an inherited, chronic disease that affects the lungs, digestive system and fertility of about 30,000 children and adults in the United States. Approximately 1,000 of these cases are being treated in Alabama. Cystic fibrosis center directors at UAB, Children's and USA predict that with the addition of the cystic fibrosis test to the newborn screening panel an additional 20 to 30 new infant cases will be identified each year. Detection will allow these children to begin treatment at the earliest possible moment. While there is no current cure for cystic fibrosis, early detection and treatment can improve growth and lung function and as a result provide an opportunity for our children to lead longer, healthier lives.

State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson states, "Newborn screening is one of Alabama's most important and effective public health programs. It can mean the difference between life and death or disability and healthy development for many of our over 60,000 babies born in Alabama each year."

For more information about newborn screening or cystic fibrosis, please contact Robert S. Hinds, Director, Alabama Newborn Screening Division, Bureau of Family Health Services, Alabama Department of Public Health, at 334-206-5556 or log onto the Newborn Screening Web site at http://www.adph.org/newbornscreening.

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4/18/08