

Various Hemoglobinopathies (Var Hb)

What is Hemoglobin?

Hemoglobin is a protein found in the red blood cell that carries oxygen throughout the entire body. The most common type of hemoglobin is Hb A, which is adult hemoglobin. Newborns also produce Hb F or fetal hemoglobin, as well as some Hb A. About six months after birth, the fetal hemoglobin is no longer made and only Hb A is produced.

What is a Hemoglobinopathy?

Besides Hb A and Hb F, some babies may have an additional type of hemoglobin that does not function normally. They are caused by mutations in the DNA and while some are benign, others can cause blood disorders. A parent may be a carrier of a hemoglobinopathy and not even know it, so it is important to consider having testing done to find out your hemoglobin type.

Severity of Hemoglobinopathies

Mutations of the hemoglobin can have different effects on the red blood cell, such as shape of the cell or how well the cell carries oxygen. These abnormalities may cause problems such as anemia, jaundice, and pain. If your baby inherits abnormal hemoglobin from only one parent, then they will be a carrier and may have mild symptoms or none at all. If the baby inherits abnormal hemoglobin from both parents, then the baby may have a more serious blood disorder, possibly causing anemia, jaundice, and problems with the spleen.

Early Signs of Hemoglobinopathies

Early signs may include sleeping longer or more often, shortness of breath, pain or swelling in the hands or feet, pale skin, and the hands or feet may feel cold. If you notice any of these signs, contact your baby's primary care provider right away.

Treatment

Although there is no cure for hemoglobinopathies, with proper treatment your baby can usually lead a normal, healthy life. More testing on your baby's blood may be done to determine the type of the hemoglobinopathy. Depending on the severity, your baby may need little to no treatment or they may require medications and also referral to a pediatric hematologist, which is a physician that specializes in blood disorders. Either way, it is very important for your baby to see the primary care provider regularly for well checks, vaccines, and sick visits to stay healthy as they grow.