



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

[www.adph.org](http://www.adph.org)

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## March of Dimes recognizes State Health Officer for leadership in newborn screening

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### CONTACT:

Cindy Ashley

(334) 206-2971

Robin A. Collins

(205) 588-0501

The March of Dimes recognized State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson on Sept. 18 for his leadership in newborn screening. Alabama newborns are screened for 30 primary treatable metabolic and functional disorders as recommended by the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services and endorsed by the March of Dimes and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

While most of the disorders are rare, they are usually serious. Some may be life threatening; others may slow down a baby's physical development or cause mental retardation or other problems if left undetected and untreated. On June 21 Alabama added a screening test for Critical Congenital Heart Disease (CCHD), bringing the total number of primary screening tests to 30.

"The March of Dimes applauds Dr. Williamson for his unwavering commitment to newborn screening," said Camille A. Epps, March of Dimes state director. "Screening for treatable conditions immediately after birth can mean the difference between a healthy life or a severe disability or even death for a newborn. Tragedy can be avoided by quickly identifying a problem and providing the necessary medical treatment—which brings immeasurable relief to the families of almost 60,000 babies born in Alabama every year."

Screening of infants by measuring blood oxygen saturation using pulse oximetry technology can identify specific structural heart defects and prevent delayed diagnosis and treatment. Each birthing facility in the state has implemented screening for CCHD in its newborn nursery and reports failed screening results to the department. The screening is painless and noninvasive and targets seven specific and five secondary cardiac anomalies.

Ten Alabama newborns have been identified with congenital heart defects that might have gone undetected had they not had CCHD screening that began in April 2012 on a voluntary basis. As a result, these infants have been afforded access to diagnostic evaluation through pediatric specialists to receive specialized care and treatment that could prevent death or disability.

"Our success in implementing newborn screening for CCHD has been made possible thanks to the collaboration of many stakeholders whose expertise is crucial to the process," Dr.

Williamson said. "I am pleased to accept this recognition from the March of Dimes on behalf of the members of the Newborn Screening Advisory Council, the CCHD Workgroup, the Alabama Hospital Association, parent advocates, the Bureau of Family Health Services and others."

The Alabama Newborn Screening Program began the process to screen for CCHD in September 2011. The CCHD workgroup was convened in November and December 2011 to create a standard protocol for pulse oximetry screening in Alabama's well baby nurseries.

In August 2012, just four months after screening began, an infant was identified with CCHD. After one year of voluntary screening, the Alabama Board of Health Administrative Code was amended to include CCHD. Alabama became the 22<sup>nd</sup> state to add CCHD to the state screening panel, according to the March of Dimes.

Newborn screening has been named one of the top public health achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Alabama remains ahead of the national average in screening its newborns. During 2012, 162 infants were identified with a primary newborn screening condition. Alabama screens for 30 primary disorders and over 40 total disorders, including secondary conditions. Most affected babies have the opportunity grow up healthy and develop normally through a simple blood screen that saves babies from death or disability.