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STATE EXPANDS NEWBORN GENETIC DISEASE SCREENING PROGRAM

SACRAMENTO – California newborns will now be tested for 75 hereditary and congenital disorders, state health officials announced today at a State Capitol event to launch the expansion of a statewide newborn screening program.

“In his first year in office, the Governor signed legislation that led to the biggest expansion of the newborn screening program in 13 years,” said Kim Belshé, secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency. “Early diagnosis can help a child lead a full, productive life. All newborns needing follow-up care are closely tracked to ensure that subsequent testing is completed and babies receive appropriate services and treatment.”

Previously, California tested for 39 genetic disorders. Under pilot testing of the new expanded program, California identified 15 newborns with genetic disorders that would have otherwise been undiagnosed. Annually, the expanded testing program is expected to identify an additional 80 to 100 infants with genetic disorders. Prior to the expansion of the program, California identified approximately 525 infants with genetic disorders annually.

California is currently one of only 13 states that screen for more than 30 disorders in newborns. More importantly, California is unique in providing comprehensive follow-up to ensure that babies with positive tests receive the treatment they require to ensure a healthy future.

“The screening of newborn babies is critical to the development of California’s children,” said State Health Director Sandra Shewry. “I urge all parents to have their newborns tested so that potential congenital disorders can be diagnosed and treated appropriately and effectively.”

In 2004, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed legislation {SB 142 (Alpert) and SB 1103 (Committee on Budget)}, which required the California Department of Health Services to expand the existing statewide newborn screening program by Aug. 1, 2005. This state-of-the-art program was designed to utilize a computer-based clinical screening system with tandem mass spectrometry (MS/MS) to screen for 75 different disorders.