

'Heel-stick' blood tests

What is a heel-stick?

A heel-stick is a way to collect a small sample of blood for testing.

Here's how it's done:

1. After cleaning your baby's heel, a tiny puncture is made in the skin.
2. A little blood is collected in a small tube.
3. The tube is sent to the laboratory (lab) for testing.

This is also known as capillary blood sampling, because the sample of blood comes from tiny blood vessels near the surface of the skin, which are called capillaries.

Why does my baby need this done?

Blood tests give us information about your baby's condition, which we use to make decisions about their care. Your baby may need many blood tests.

Heel sticks are done for tests that only need a small amount of blood. If a larger amount of blood is needed for a test, the sample must be taken from a vein using a needle.

Does this hurt? Can we make it less painful?

Babies can feel pain when their heel is punctured, but we can lessen the pain.

To comfort your baby during the test, hold your baby close or breastfeed your baby (if your baby is well enough).

Other ways that you and the health care team can reduce pain include:

- putting a few drops of sugar water (sucrose) or breast milk on your baby's tongue
- bundling your baby in a blanket
- giving your baby a soother to suck on

How do I get the results of blood tests?

Your baby's nurse and doctor will meet with you regularly to discuss your baby's condition and needs. During these updates, they can give you the results of your baby's blood tests.

If test results are not ready before you go home, your family doctor or pediatrician can give you the results.

If you have questions about your baby's heel-stick blood tests, please ask any member of your baby's health care team.