

The California Prenatal Screening Program



Screening for Genetic Conditions and Birth Defects

The [California Prenatal Screening \(PNS\) Program](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/PNS) (www.cdph.ca.gov/PNS) is a statewide program offered by prenatal care providers to all pregnant individuals in California. Prenatal screening uses a pregnant individual's blood samples to screen for certain genetic conditions and birth defects in their fetus (developing baby). Individuals found to have an increased chance of one of those conditions or defects in their fetus are offered genetic counseling and other follow-up services through state-approved Prenatal Diagnosis Centers. Medi-Cal and private insurance must cover all program fees, with only a few exceptions for self-employers and out-of-state health plans. Prenatal screening is optional. You decide whether you want it or not. You decide whether you want it through the high-quality, noncommercial state program.

What are genetic conditions and birth defects?

Genetic conditions and birth defects can affect the health and development of the fetus. Genetic conditions and birth defects sometimes happen by chance, or they may be passed down in families. Down syndrome and other genetic conditions that the PNS Program screens for in a fetus are caused by extra or missing chromosomes. Chromosomes guide the fetus' development and are found in every cell in the body.

The PNS Program can detect these genetic conditions or birth defects:

Type of conditions	Name of conditions	Description
Autosomal trisomies	Trisomy 21 (Down syndrome)	This genetic condition causes mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. Down syndrome can cause serious but treatable health problems such as heart defects.
	Trisomy 18	These genetic conditions cause severe intellectual disabilities and serious health problems.
	Trisomy 13	
Birth defect	Neural tube defects	This birth defect results from a problem in the development of the brain or spinal cord. Examples are anencephaly or spina bifida.
X and Y chromosome variations	Turner syndrome	This genetic condition can cause mild developmental delays, learning disabilities, short stature, infertility, and heart defects.
	XXY (Klinefelter)	These genetic conditions cause symptoms that vary from one person to another. Some individuals have no noticeable symptoms. In others, effects might include developmental delays and learning disabilities. Individuals often respond well to early intervention services like speech therapy.
	XYY	
	Trisomy X	

Some genetic conditions could affect your pregnancy

Miscarriage is common in pregnancies when the fetus has trisomy 18, trisomy 13, and Turner syndrome.

Checking the health of the fetus before birth

Prenatal screening is **your choice**. If you decide to do prenatal screening, you can get one or two blood samples collected. Each sample is checked to find out if there is an **increased chance** your fetus has certain genetic conditions or birth defects. If there is an increased chance, your prenatal care provider will talk with you about next steps. You decide if you want further genetic counseling, an ultrasound exam, or diagnostic testing.

How is prenatal screening different from diagnostic testing?

Prenatal screening **estimates** the chances of certain genetic conditions or birth defects. If your prenatal screening result shows an increased chance, **diagnostic testing is needed for a clear answer**.

What to expect from the California Prenatal Screening Program



DISCUSS. Your prenatal care provider will offer you prenatal screening through this program. It is not required. The prenatal screening will help you learn if your fetus has an increased chance of certain genetic conditions or birth defects.



If you choose to participate in the California Prenatal Screening (PNS) Program and have Medi-Cal or private health insurance, they will cover the fees for this screening, with only a few exceptions. The fees are \$344 and \$85 for the screenings (as of July 2024).

CONSENT. If you want prenatal screening, your prenatal care provider will ask you to sign consent form(s), one for each of the two screenings (cell-free DNA and maternal serum alpha-fetoprotein). Both are important because they screen for different conditions. If you do not want prenatal screening, you will need to sign the decline forms.

SCREEN. Your prenatal care provider will tell you where to go to get your blood collected for the prenatal screening(s). Blood collection may be in a laboratory or at your prenatal care provider's office. For each screening, a staff member will take a small amount of blood from your arm and send it to a laboratory.

COMMUNICATE. You will be contacted by your prenatal care provider's office to let you know your cell-free DNA and maternal serum alpha-fetoprotein screening results.

FOLLOW-UP SERVICES. If either screening result shows your fetus has an increased chance of one of the genetic conditions or birth defects, this does not always mean that there is one. The PNS Program will offer you follow-up services at a state-approved Prenatal Diagnosis Center, where you will first be able to speak with a genetic counselor and you will be offered a detailed ultrasound exam of your fetus. Then, you decide if you want a diagnostic test to find out if your fetus has a genetic condition or birth defect.

The follow-up services include:

- Genetic counseling
- Ultrasound exam
- Diagnostic testing: chorionic villus sampling or amniocentesis



If you get prenatal screening through the PNS Program, the follow-up services are available to you at no additional cost.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Information Survey for You

As a state program, the PNS Program must ask for information on sexual orientation and gender identity when collecting an individual's data. This information is collected on a [Sexual Orientation Gender Identity \(SOGI\) survey](https://forms.office.com/g/LRUWGV7Xx) (<https://forms.office.com/g/LRUWGV7Xx>). You are not required to complete the SOGI survey form. If you choose to provide this information, it will not be traced to you or your prenatal screening test results.

Prenatal Screening Patient Information

To read the full Prenatal Screening Patient Booklet, watch a video, or get more information about the California Prenatal Screening Program, please visit the [Prenatal Screening Information for Individuals web page](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/MyScreening) ([go.cdph.ca.gov/MyScreening](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/MyScreening)).

Note: Your prenatal care provider may speak to you about getting **prenatal diagnosis** instead of prenatal screening. If not, you can ask them if prenatal diagnosis is recommended for you.

