



# The California Prenatal Screening Program

## Screening for Birth Defects

The **California Prenatal Screening Program** ([www.cdph.ca.gov/PNS](http://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 birth defects in their fetus (developing baby). Individuals with a fetus found to have an increased chance of one of those birth defects are offered genetic counseling and other follow-up services through state-contracted 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.

### What are birth defects?

Birth defects are conditions in a fetus that can cause physical changes and intellectual disabilities. Birth defects most often happen by chance and usually do not run in families. Down syndrome and other "genetic conditions" that the PNS Program screens for in a fetus are caused by an extra chromosome. Chromosomes help the fetus develop and are found in every cell in the body.

### KEY DEFINITION

Research has shown that "birth defects" is the most commonly used and best understood term for the genetic conditions and neural tube defects that the PNS Program screens for.

### Checking the health of the fetus before birth

If you decide to do prenatal screening, it requires you to give two blood samples. Each sample is checked to find out if there is an **increased chance** your fetus has certain 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, ultrasound exam, or diagnostic testing.

### How is prenatal screening different from diagnostic testing?

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

### The PNS Program can detect these four types of birth defects:

Birth defect	Disabilities caused by the birth defect
Trisomy 21 or Down syndrome	This genetic condition causes mild to severe intellectual disabilities and serious health problems such as heart defects.
Trisomy 18 or Edwards syndrome	This genetic condition causes severe intellectual disabilities and serious health problems. Most pregnancies with trisomy 18 end on their own through miscarriage.
Trisomy 13 or Patau syndrome	This genetic condition causes severe intellectual disabilities and serious health problems. Most pregnancies with trisomy 13 end on their own through miscarriage.
Neural tube defects	This birth defect causes problems in the development of the brain or spine, like spina bifida (open spine).



# 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 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 your program fees, with only a few exceptions. The fees are \$232 and \$85 for the screenings.

**CONSENT.** If you want prenatal screening, your prenatal care provider will ask you to sign two consent forms, one for each of the two screenings. Both are important because they screen for different things. If you do not want prenatal screening, you will need to sign decline forms.

**SCREEN.** Your prenatal care provider will tell you where to go to get your blood taken for the two prenatal screenings. It 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 twice 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 birth defects, this does not always mean that there is a birth defect. The PNS Program will offer you follow-up services at a state-approved Prenatal Diagnosis Center. First, you will be able to speak with a genetic counselor. 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 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.

**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.

## Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Information Survey for You

As a state program, the PNS Program must ask for information on the sexual orientation and gender identity when collecting individual's data. This information is collected on a [Sexual Orientation Gender Identity \(SOGI\) survey](https://forms.office.com/g/LRUWGVET7Xx) (<https://forms.office.com/g/LRUWGVET7Xx>). 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 Booklet

If you are interested in reading the Prenatal Screening Patient Booklet or getting additional information about the California Prenatal Screening Program, the birth defects screened for, your choices after screening, and more, please visit the [Prenatal Screening Patient Booklet web page](https://bit.ly/PNSPatientBooklet) (<https://bit.ly/PNSPatientBooklet>). On that web page, you will also find a video that will tell you more about prenatal screening.

