

Pregnancy and Prenatal Screening for Birth Defects



The **California Prenatal Screening Program** is a state program available to all pregnant individuals in California. It uses a pregnant individual's blood samples to screen for certain birth defects in their fetus. The state program makes genetic counseling and other services available to that person if the screening finds increased chances of a birth defect in the fetus.

Why is this state program important?

This program focuses on certain birth defects, which are changes that can cause physical and intellectual disabilities in a fetus. As a state screening program, it ensures that all pregnant people benefit from high-quality screening, counseling, and diagnostic testing so they have information early about the health of the fetus.



Is participation required in this program?

No. This program makes prenatal screening available to all pregnant individuals in Californians who want it.

How much does this program cost the person who participates?

Both Medi-Cal or private health insurance cover all participation fees. The fee is \$232 for first trimester screening, and \$85 for second trimester screening. Both screenings are recommended because they screen for different birth defects. For parents who find out through this program that their fetus has an increased chance of having a certain birth defect, genetic counseling and diagnostic testing are covered at no additional charge. Patients without Medi-Cal or insurance will be directly billed.

What is prenatal screening?

Prenatal screening checks if a fetus has an **increased chance** of having one of a few birth defects that are screened for. Screening is a way to find those people in a large population who might benefit from genetic counseling, diagnostic testing, and other services.

How is prenatal screening different from diagnostic testing?

Unlike screening, diagnostic testing is more definitive and can tell whether a fetus **does actually have** a birth defect, not just an increased chance of it. Chorionic villus sampling and amniocentesis are diagnostic tests. Ultrasounds may also provide information about certain birth defects.

How is the California Prenatal Screening Program changing?

The state program is being redesigned in September 2022 to offer the most up-to-date screening technology to all Californians. The program will offer (1) cfDNA screening in the first trimester of pregnancy to screen for Down syndrome and other serious birth defects and (2) MSAFP screening in the second trimester of pregnancy to screen for neural tube defects. Both screenings are recommended since they screen for different birth defects.

[Prenatal Screening for Individuals & Families web page \(https://bit.ly/PNS4Pregnancy\)](https://bit.ly/PNS4Pregnancy)