



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – September 18, 2014
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Arizona Recognized for Outstanding Leadership in Newborn Screening Process

The March of Dimes today announced a new award, the Newborn Screening Quality Award, and gave it to the Arizona Department of Health Services for outstanding changes in the newborn screening process. The March of Dimes cited the Department’s ability to turn around such a critical program in months and creating a transparent system that other states can copy as the reasons for the new award.



“Our staff and hospitals across the state embraced the issue knowing that the sooner we could test the newborn blood spots for life-changing or -ending disease, the better it would be for the babies,” said Will Humble, director of the Arizona Department of Health Services. “This intense group effort to make sure the babies’ tests quickly made it to lab shows what can happen when you identify a situation, set goals and work together to overcome obstacles.”

Blood spots are taken from babies within the first few hours of birth and sent to the Arizona Public Health Laboratory for evaluation. At the lab, 28 tests check for diseases that can alert physicians to digestive or developmental issues; quick intervention for babies with those diseases will make a significant difference in their lives.

In December 2013, 67 percent of the samples were making it to the state laboratory within three days; others were taking more than five. By July 2014, 98 percent were checked into the lab within three days and none took five days. The department’s transit time task force worked with hospitals to identify issues including the courier service, when the state lab was open and clear processes in hospitals to make sure everyone from the delivery room to the mailroom knew the importance of the tests. The monthly reports are available [online](#) for anyone to see.

The March of Dimes established the new awards in honor of Dr. Robert Guthrie, known as “the father of newborn screening” for developing the first mass screening test for babies 51 years ago. The awards recognize leadership in establishing culture of safety as a way to avoid those deadly delays in states’ newborn screening process.

For more information on the March of Dimes, please contact Elizabeth Lynch, (914) 997-4286. Locally, contact Terri Spitz, (602) 321-7989.

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