

# Alpha Thalassemia Trait

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Congratulations on the birth of your new baby! As part of the routine newborn screen, Utah tests all babies for sickle cell disease and other serious inherited hemoglobin problems. Sometimes, in the process of looking for serious problems, we find babies who are carriers of unusual hemoglobin types. On your baby's newborn screening test a different kind of hemoglobin was found. This guide will help answer some of your questions. It should not take the place of an informed discussion with your medical home (doctor).

## **Is my baby sick?**

No. Alpha thalassemia trait is not an illness. Your baby is healthy.

Your baby's red blood cells may look small and pale. People with low iron levels also have red blood cells that look small and pale. Before you give your baby iron, talk with your baby's doctor about alpha thalassemia trait.

## **How did my baby get alpha thalassemia trait?**

Alpha thalassemia trait, like hair color and height, is passed down in the family through genes. Usually a person has 4 alpha genes, 2 from each parent. Alpha thalassemia occurs when one or more of the alpha genes are missing.

Your baby is missing either 1 or 2 alpha genes. When your baby is a little older your doctor will do a blood test called a Complete Blood Count (CBC) to help determine how many genes are missing.

## **Is alpha thalassemia more common in certain ethnic or racial groups?**

Although any family can pass down alpha thalassemia trait, it is more common in people of certain ethnic or racial groups. Alpha thalassemia trait is very common in people whose ancestors came from Southeast Asia, especially Cambodia, Laos and Thailand.

## **Is there anything a person with alpha thalassemia trait should do?**

If you need more information about alpha thalassemia trait, talk to your doctor. You may also want to have a genetic consultation for your family to see how alpha thalassemia trait might affect future children, or your grandchildren.

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Newborn  
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