California Prenatal Screening Program
Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I’ve been hearing about a new AFP screening. What will be new about the AFP program?

A: Though the program will still include the second trimester screening that we are all accustomed to, screening through the state program will now include some additional features and options. Here are some of the biggest changes:

- First trimester screening by serum marker analysis with first trimester ultrasound including a nuchal translucency (NT) measurement will now be included as an option along with second trimester serum screening.
- Patients have the following screening options:
  - Integrated serum screening:
    - Combined first and second trimester serum screening risk assessment
    - Patient has 2 blood draws and gets 1 risk assessment in second trimester
  - Full Integrated screening:
    - First trimester serum plus NT for first trimester risk assessment followed by second trimester screening risk assessment
    - Patient has 2 blood draws plus an NT ultrasound
    - Patient gets a risk assessment in the first trimester and 1 integrated risk assessment in the second trimester
  - Second trimester only screening:
    - Same as the current second trimester AFP screening risk assessment
    - Patient has 1 blood draw and gets 1 risk assessment in the second trimester
- Since the testing now includes first trimester screening the California Expanded AFP Program will now be called the California Prenatal Screening Program.
- In addition to amniocentesis, patients with a screen positive result in the first trimester will have the option of chorionic villus sampling (CVS) for diagnostic purposes.

Q: We don’t have any NT certified practitioners in our area. Is Prenatal Diagnosis of Northern CA prepared to take all these NT patients?

A: Absolutely! We would be happy to see all your patients for the 1st trimester NT ultrasound. A benefit to sending patients to our office is that your patient may be able to receive immediate follow up services if she has a screen positive result. Just remember to make sure your patient gets her blood drawn at least a week before she comes in for her NT so she can get an instant risk assessment. Also please remember to put your patient’s Test Requisition Form (TRF) number on the referral (at the top of the lab slip) so we can identify her in the CA State SIS computer system.

Q: Are OB offices going to get different lab slips for this new test?

A: Yes. The Genetic Disease Screening Program will send you new lab slips. Detailed information and start-up packets for clinicians will be sent in March 2009. There are 2 sets of lab slips. One is for first trimester screening and the other is for second trimester screening.
**Q: Who should order the 1st trimester screening blood test?**

**A:** The blood test should be ordered by her doctor’s office. Send the patient to the laboratory she would normally use for blood tests. The patient can have her blood between 10 weeks 0 days – 13 weeks 6 days gestation. **We recommend that the patient draw her blood at least 1 week before she has her NT screening ultrasound so that she may get an instant risk assessment at our office after her ultrasound.** At our office patients with positive instant risk assessments can be offered follow up services immediately after their NT screening.

**Q: Will this new testing be covered by the patient’s insurance or Medi-Cal?**

**A:** The blood/serum portion of the testing will be covered, just as it was with AFP screening. However, unlike in the past, the State Program will now have the ability to bill the serum portion of the screening directly to the patient’s insurance. If the patient has Medi-Cal, please write her Med-Cal number directly on the form. If the patient has private insurance, send a copy of the insurance card with the blood specimen. The insurance will be billed directly. If insurance information and/or an insurance card is not included, the patient will receive a bill and an insurance information form to fill out and submit to the Prenatal Screening Program. Regardless of the number of blood draws, there is only one program fee for the blood test (currently $162).

Most private insurance companies will also cover the NT ultrasound portion of the first trimester screening, although, this is policy and company dependent. In addition, it is our understanding that Medi-Cal is planning to adopt the CPT codes used for the NT ultrasound. However, at this time, it is not a covered benefit. We will be updating this information daily and when Medi-Cal completes this transition, we will alert you.

**Q: How do I schedule a patient for a California Prenatal Screening Program NT? Is it like scheduling other patients at your office?**

**A:** Yes! Please have someone from your office call us to make an appointment and/or fax over a paper referral. When filling out paper referrals, please put **California NT screening**, under “Indication”. Also, please make sure to include the patient’s TRF number from the top of the lab requisition slip. This will allow us to identify the patient in the SIS computer system and provide her results while she’s here. **Without the TRF number we CANNOT give the patient an instant first trimester risk assessment.**

Please note: The CA Prenatal Screening Program does not pay for NT ultrasound exams. We will bill the NT exam to the patient’s insurance. The CA Prenatal Screening Program WILL continue to pay for all follow up services (genetic counseling, ultrasound exam, CVS, amniocentesis) for SCREEN POSITIVE patients.

**Q: What if a patient does not get her first trimester blood sample drawn before she has her NT screening?**

**A:** Getting an NT screening before the blood draw is OK. However, she will NOT receive an instant risk assessment after her ultrasound exam. Instead the California Prenatal Screening Program office will combine the patients NT results once the blood work is done. Your office will be contacted with the first trimester screening results.
We can only provide an instant 1<sup>st</sup> trimester risk assessment to a patient if 1) her blood sample has been analyzed by the California Prenatal Screening lab AND 2) we have the patient’s TRF number from the top of the test requisition slip.

Q: What should I do if my patient is screen positive after the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester screen?

A: Have your patient return to our office where she will meet with a genetic counselor. She can then choose CVS or amnio, or wait until the second trimester screening results are available.

Q: What happens if my patient screens negative after the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester screen?

A: If the patient has a negative 1<sup>st</sup> trimester screen, she should have her blood drawn again between 15-20 weeks for the 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester screen. After she has the second blood draw, the patient will get an integrated result which combines the first and second trimester screens.

Q: My patient did not get a first trimester risk even though she completed the blood work. What happened?

A: Only patients who have a nuchal translucency (NT) measurement will receive a 1<sup>st</sup> trimester risk assessment. If the patient is not able to have the NT ultrasound performed, she may still have her blood drawn for the first trimester serum portion of the testing. The information obtained from the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester serum will then be combined with the 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester blood work to provide the patient with an integrated serum result. The serum integrated screening has a higher detection rate for Down syndrome and trisomy 18 than that provided by the 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester only screening. Therefore, even if an NT ultrasound is not available for the patient, it is still beneficial to perform the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester serum screening.

Q: What happens if my patient is screen positive after the 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester screen?

A: If your patient receives a screen positive result after the 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester she will receive the same services as have traditionally been available through the California Expanded AFP screening program. The prenatal screening office will contact you and the patient will be referred to our office for genetic counseling, ultrasound, and amniocentesis, if she elects. This will be true for patients that have screened positive on the integrated test AND for those that are screen positive on the 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester serum only screening.

If your patient has declined diagnostic testing in the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester and postponed testing until the 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester, her return appointment will consist of a ‘modified’ genetic counseling visit (to discuss the amniocentesis procedure), an ultrasound, and amniocentesis.

Q: My patient is too late for first trimester screening. Can she still have 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester screening?
A: Yes! She is still eligible for 2\textsuperscript{nd} trimester serum only screening (quad screening), which is the same as Expanded AFP screening. Fill out the second trimester screening test requisition form and send the patient for a blood draw.