

For Immediate Release
November 23, 2006
2006/nr-133

MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT EXPANDS NEWBORN SCREENING *Screening For Cystic Fibrosis Brings Total Number Of Tests To 28*

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is investing in newborn screening for Cystic Fibrosis (CF) to ensure that babies who need treatment receive it as early as possible, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

“Early detection of Cystic Fibrosis in newborns will help ensure they receive the care they need as soon as possible,” said Smitherman. “While there is no cure for Cystic Fibrosis, we know early detection and treatment can reduce its burden on children and increase their life expectancy”.

The Ontario government is investing an additional \$1.2 million annually to incorporate testing for Cystic Fibrosis into the Newborn Screening Program, which is housed at The Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO). Screening for CF will begin in late 2007.

CF is a genetic disease that affects mainly the lungs and digestive system, causing severe breathing problems and often leading to infections. CF also makes it difficult to digest and absorb adequate nutrients from food.

It is estimated that one in every 3,600 children born in Ontario has CF. Studies show that early diagnosis of CF can reduce the need for demanding therapies, and lead to fewer days in hospital, lower rates of complications and a longer life expectancy.

"Cystic Fibrosis is the most common fatal genetic disease affecting young Canadians," said Cathleen Morrison, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, "The evidence is clear that infants diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis at one month of age, or earlier, get a better start in life. The Foundation applauds the Government of Ontario for its leadership on this initiative."

In November 2005, Ontario announced the expansion of its Newborn Screening Program to 27 tests by the end of 2006. Testing for CF will bring the total number of rare conditions for which Ontario screens newborns to 28. Investments in the implementation of the enhanced program totaled \$5 million for the one-time purchase of technology as well as \$7.6 million annually to support the program and its screening facility at CHEO.

Today’s announcement is just the latest example of how the McGuinty government is on the side of Ontario families concerned about their children’s health. Other initiatives include:

- Adding three new vaccines, free of charge, to protect against chicken pox, meningococcal and pneumococcal disease
- Funding insulin pumps and related supplies for about 6,500 children living with Type 1 diabetes
- Funding the expansion of the hematology and cancer outpatient clinic at The Hospital for Sick Children.

Newborn screening for Cystic Fibrosis is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities - keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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