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Yahoo! News Sun, Jun 20, 2004

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Newborn Heel Sticks Avoided with Jaundice Meter



Fri Jun 18, 4:23 PM ET

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By *Will Boggs*

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - A new skin meter accurately detects jaundice in newborn infants, researchers have shown. In many cases, the device makes it unnecessary to perform heel sticks to get blood samples, which can be distressing for babies and their parents.

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Jaundice occurs when excess levels of bilirubin, a reddish-yellow pigment, build up in the blood. The Jaundice Meter measures bilirubin transcutaneously -- that is, by shining light of different colors through the skin and measuring the reflection.

Dr. M. Jeffrey Maisels from William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Michigan, and colleagues evaluated the accuracy of the JM-103 meter, compared with bilirubin levels measured in a blood sample, in 849 full-term newborns.

The babies represented all skin types, including white, black, East Asian, Middle Eastern, Indian/Pakistani and Hispanic.

Values obtained by the meter differed significantly from the blood test results in only 2 percent of white, 17.4 percent of black, and 3.2 percent of other infants, the authors report. In all of these black infants, JM-103 values differed safely on the high side.

"Transcutaneous bilirubin measurements should obviate the need for most serum bilirubin levels in newborn infants," Maisels's team concludes

However, they advise, blood measurements are still necessary when treatment of jaundice is thought to be necessary.

"Until we have more information, I recommend that transcutaneous bilirubin measurements be used as a screening tool," Maisels commented to Reuters Health.

He explained that doctors can set a value for bilirubin on the meter, based on the infant's age in hours and other risk factors, above which a blood reading would always be obtained.

In this way no baby with serious jaundice should be missed, while "many infants and their families will be spared the trauma, cost, and inconvenience of having a laboratory measurement," Maisels concluded.

SOURCE: Pediatrics, June 2004.

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