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NeoGen Labs to launch newborn screening tests to detect IEMs in babies

Tuesday, May 08, 2007 08:00 IST

Nandita Vijay, Bangalore

NeoGen Labs, a newborn screening (NBS) provider to detect inborn errors of metabolisms (IEMs) in babies, is gearing up to offer the commercial testing from July this year. The company's one year-old advanced centralized lab in Bangalore can process about 1,20, 000 tests annually.

IEMs prevent the baby from 'processing' food properly, leading to an accumulation of toxic chemicals in the blood, which are harmful to its normal development. The test detects abnormal levels of these chemicals from a single drop of dried blood.

The company is utilizing the exclusive technology of Paediatrics Screening, USA, the world leader and pioneers Tandem Mass Spectrometry (MS/MS) for screening IEMs. In order to maximize the use of the technology, Paediatrics is training the NeoGen team.

NeoGen's NBS known as 'first step' allows detection of over 42 IEMs.

The test is conducted immediately after birth to allow paediatricians administer faster treatment even before symptoms are pronounced, thus leading to the baby's normal development. In most cases, the treatment involves a dietary change or addition of a vitamin.

So far, the Indian doctors used to send the tests abroad but now with the commissioning of NeoGen's new facility, reports would be made available within a week if normal, and within 48 hours if positive for any of the disorders. If positive, the result is accompanied by material containing information on the disorder, the treatment, list of IEM specialists and genetic counsellors in India, allowing parents to begin treatment immediately.

NeoGen Labs was formed last year by Dr. Rohit Cariappa and Thomas Mookken. The lab is equipped with evaporators, HPLC, nitrogen generators to prepare samples and interpret MS/MS results. "Bangalore meets the target demographic of our market. Only one lab is required to service the entire country. Samples can be sent from

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anywhere in India by courier for the test. We are building a sample collection network," Nihal George, senior manager, NeoGen Labs told Pharmabiz.

In India, benefits of NBS have not been realized fully because of affordability. Only babies which are from families with a history of genetic disorders are screened for limited metabolic disorders. Screening babies from high risk families alone is inadequate, because most of the time these disorders appear in babies with no family history of metabolic disorders because the parents are 'silent carriers', stated George.

According to Indian Journal of Paediatrics, annually 24 million babies are born, of which around 21,000 babies are affected by IEMs accounting for one in every 1,000 in the country.



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