New Florida Legislation, Supported by Nemours Children's Health, Adds Critical Measures to Protect Newborns Against the Most Common Cause of Non-Genetic Hearing Loss

Senate Bill 168 requires screening and care protocols to protect kids against congenital cytomegalovirus.

ORLANDO, Fla. (May 10, 2024) – Every 60 minutes, a child is permanently disabled due to congenital cytomegalovirus (CMV). Now, newborns in Florida have an additional layer of protection against the virus, thanks to new screening requirements passed as part of Senate Bill 168, which was signed into law earlier today.

"Early identification of congenital cytomegalovirus in high-risk infants is very important and facilitates the provision of appropriate intervention, and we are grateful for the support of the Florida Legislature and governor in the passing of this bill," said Cedric Pritchett, MD, Co-Director of the Nemours Children's Ear, Hearing and Communication Center and Medical Director of the Cochlear Implant Program at Nemours Children's Health. "This legislation positions Florida among the nation's leaders in early detection and treatment for CMV, and the children of our state stand to benefit tremendously as a result."

CMV is the most common cause of non-genetic hearing loss in infants. The legislation requires certain hospitals to administer CMV screenings on newborns admitted to the hospital under specified circumstances; provides coverage under the Medicaid program for the screenings and any medically necessary follow-up reevaluations; and requires that newborns diagnosed with CMV be referred to a primary care physician for medical management, treatment and follow-up services.

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"I appreciate the state's prioritization of measures that help detect, prevent and treat CMV," said Jane Ierardi, MD, Neonatologist and Chief Partnership Officer for Nemours Children's Health. "With this legislation, the newly enacted screening measures will enable clinicians to recognize and treat this virus at a level not seen prior and because of that, many more children will have the opportunity to live fuller, healthier lives."

Senate Bill 168 amends newborn health screening requirements in Florida Statute 383.145. The bill was filed by Sen. Tina Polsky and Rep. Lauren Melo. In the championing of this bill, Dr. Pritchett served on the Florida CMV Collaborative, a consortium of health care providers dedicated to education and screening for the virus. And during the 2024 legislative session, Dr. Ierardi testified before state officials in Tallahassee on the importance of this legislation and its potential impacts on the health of Florida's children.

Media Contact: Mario Roberts, mario.roberts@nemours.org, (407) 840-5235.

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About Nemours Children's Health

Nemours Children's Health is one of the nation's largest multistate pediatric health systems, which includes two free-standing children's hospitals and a network of more than 70 primary and specialty care practices. Nemours Children's seeks to transform the health of children by adopting a holistic health model that utilizes innovative, safe, and high-quality care, while also caring for the health of the whole child beyond medicine. Nemours Children's also powers the world's most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, Nemours KidsHealth.org.

The Nemours Foundation, established through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to the children, families and communities it serves. For more information, visit Nemours.org.