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Brushfield's Spots - white spots on the iris - are common for children suffering from Down syndrome
Wikipedia Commons

[Down Syndrome Test Shows Fetus Health](#)

The disease can be identified in the first trimester of pregnancy

Denmark is currently a world leader in setting up a national system of Down syndrome prevention and detection, newly-published study results show. The paper, published November 27th in the British Medical Journal (BMJ), details how the nation managed to reduce its numbers of Down syndrome infants by more than half, as well as how the pre-natal detection rate of the condition went up by more than 30 percent.

The measures the Danish Health Department set in place were made into law in 2005; still their success cannot be denied just 3 to 4 years later. Serum and ultrasound (nuchal) screenings, plus the mother's age, make up for the basic Down syndrome detection test. If the babies score a high chance of developing the disease, more invasive procedures, such as chorionic villus sampling or amniocentesis, are applied, and the infant's health is more thoroughly assessed.

By means of this method, Danish researchers, led by Professor Ann Tabor, were able to conclude that, of 65,000 yearly births, the detection rates went up to 86 percent in 2005, and further increased to 93 percent in 2006. In the same year, statistics show that more than 86 percent of all registered pregnant women in the country received some form of the test. False positive results were also diminished in numbers, as the new screening methods leave very little room for doubt.

The program is entirely optional, the paper says, so, while most women choose to take the test, there are still those who don't want to. Doctors performing these screenings are required to only perform the necessary operations if the patients give their informed consent on the procedure.

Now, several other countries, including New Zealand, the UK and Australia, are trying to develop their own similar programs, but encounter various difficulties, mostly because there is no consensus on how to distribute logistical supplies and how to formulate the screening policies. In Denmark, all 15 counties applied the 2004 ruling by 2006, with immediate results.