

**tube defects [NTDs])** constitute the largest group of congenital anomalies that are consistent with multifactorial inheritance. Normally, the spinal cord and cauda equina are encased in a protective sheath of bone and meninges ([Fig. 30-5, A](#)). Failure of neural tube closure produces defects of varying degrees ([Box 30-4](#)). They may involve the entire length of the neural tube or may be restricted to a small area.