



Neonatal Group B Streptococcal Disease

What is neonatal group B streptococcal disease?

Group B *Streptococcus* (GBS) is a bacterium that is naturally found in the vagina and bowel of healthy women from time to time. GBS can be passed to newborns during the birth process and may cause infection. Sometimes it may take several weeks for the infection to cause illness. GBS infections in babies can be serious, even life-threatening. GBS can infect the blood, lungs or lining of the brain.

What are the symptoms of neonatal Group B Streptococcal disease?

Neonatal Group B *Streptococcal* disease is the most common cause of sepsis (blood infection) and meningitis (infection of the fluid and lining around the brain) in newborns. Most newborn disease happens within the first week of life. The symptoms for early onset GBS disease can seem like other problems in newborns. Some symptoms are fever, difficulty feeding, irritability, or lethargy (limpness or hard to wake up the baby). If you think your newborn is sick, get medical help right away.

How is neonatal Group B Streptococcal disease diagnosed?

Your doctor or midwife can look for GBS by doing a simple swab of your vagina or rectum at the 35th to 37th week of your pregnancy. You do not need to be concerned about being a GBS “carrier”. The bacterium will not harm you, and you will not need treatment before labour starts, unless you get a bladder infection from GBS. If you are a GBS carrier, or if you have any risk factors during your labour, antibiotics can be given at that time. You may wish to discuss this with your doctor or midwife.

How is neonatal Group B Streptococcal Disease transmitted?

When a baby is born, if there is GBS in or around the mother’s vagina, the bacteria may get on the baby’s skin or in the baby’s mouth and be swallowed. Most of these babies will not have any problems with GBS disease, but a few will become ill with an infection from GBS.

What is the treatment for neonatal Group B Streptococcal disease?

GBS infections in both newborns and adults are usually treated with antibiotics (e.g., penicillin or ampicillin) given through a vein (IV).

What can be done to prevent neonatal Group B Streptococcal disease?

Pregnancy and labor are natural events, and GBS is normally found in the vagina of many women. If a mother has GBS in her vagina, she will be given an antibiotic (usually penicillin) during labor. The antibiotic will then be passed on through the blood to the baby to prevent infection. Antibiotics may also be given if there are certain factors present that increase the risk of the baby developing GBS infection. These “risk factors” are:

- Labour beginning before week 37 of pregnancy
- Waters breaking before week 37 of pregnancy
- Waters breaking more than 18 hours before delivery
- Previous baby with GBS infection
- Bladder infection with GBS during this pregnancy
- Fever during labour

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809



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