

Streptococcal Infection

Group B Neonatal

Fact Sheet

What is Group B streptococcal infection?

Group B Streptococcus (GBS) is a type of bacteria that causes illness in people of all ages. GBS disease in newborns commonly causes sepsis (infection of the blood), pneumonia (infection in the lungs), and sometimes meningitis (infection of the fluid and lining around the brain).

How is it spread?

GBS can commonly be found in the intestine, vagina, and rectal area of humans. Babies can become infected within the uterus or when passing through the birth canal of mothers who carry the bacteria.

What are the symptoms of group B streptococcal infections?

The symptoms of GBS disease can seem like other health problems in newborns and infants. Most newborns with early-onset disease have symptoms one to seven days after birth. Babies who develop late-onset disease may appear healthy at birth and develop symptoms of GBS seven days to several months after birth. Some symptoms are:

- Fever
- Difficulty feeding
- Irritability, or lethargy (limpness or hard to wake up the baby)
- Difficulty breathing
- Blue-ish color to skin
- Meningitis
- Sepsis

For both early and late-onset of GBS, and particularly for babies who had meningitis, there may be long-term consequences of the infection such as deafness and developmental disabilities.

How can neonatal group B streptococcal infections be prevented?

The best way to prevent GBS infection in neonatal babies is to screen mothers during pregnancy (35-37 week gestation). If a mother carries the GBS bacteria, she will be given antibiotics during birth.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Group B Strep, November 2010.
2. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Infectious Diseases Protocol 2009. Appendix A: Group B streptococcal disease, neonatal.

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