

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



July 2005

International Group B Strep Awareness Month

July is International Group B Strep Awareness Month. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in the year 2001 there were about 1,700 babies in the United States less than one week old who had early onset group B strep disease. About half of the cases of group B strep disease among newborns are early onset diseases which happen in the first week of life. Most of these cases start a few hours after birth. Late onset disease is slightly less common and may develop in infants one week to several months after birth.

How common is group B strep?

Group B strep is the most common cause of life-threatening infections in newborns. It is the most common cause of blood infection (sepsis) and meningitis (infection of the fluid and lining around the brain) in newborns. It is a frequent cause of newborn pneumonia and is more common than more well-known newborn problems such as rubella and spina bifida.

Can group B strep disease among newborns be prevented?

Most of the early onset cases can be prevented by giving pregnant women antibiotics through the vein during labor. Any pregnant woman who had a baby with group B strep in the past, who now has a bladder infection caused by group B strep, or tests

positive for group B strep during pregnancy should be given antibiotics at the time of labor or when their water breaks. Women should get tested late in pregnancy (35-37 weeks) to see if they carry group B strep.

What are the symptoms of group B strep?

Most pregnant women have no symptoms when they are carriers for group B strep bacteria. Around 25% of women may carry the bacteria at any time, which doesn't mean that they have group B strep disease, but does mean they are at a higher risk for giving their baby a group B strep infection during birth.

Symptoms of GBS in babies include:

- high-pitched cries, shrill moaning, and whimpering
- grunting with breathing
- body stiffening or uncontrollable jerking movements, even if subtle and intermittent
- marked irritability, inconsolable crying
- feeds poorly, refuses to eat
- high or low temperature
- fast, slow, or difficult breathing
- projectile vomiting
- blueness or grayness of skin (especially around the lips) due to lack of oxygen, pale skin color
- blotchy skin color, skin redness or tenderness
- sleeping too much, can't wake up for feedings
- not moving an arm or leg, listless, or floppy



- tense or bulgy spot on top of head that should normally appear flat
- blank stare or trance-like expression

(continued on pg. 2)

July is Group B Strep Awareness Month (continued from pg. 1)

Is group B strep the same as strep throat?

No. Strep throat is caused by group A streptococcus bacteria. Group A and group B belong to the same family, but they are different species. They are different kinds of bacteria.

Is there a vaccine for group B strep?

At the moment there is not a vaccine to prevent group B strep; however, the federal government is supporting research on a vaccine for the prevention of group B strep disease.

What if my water breaks early?

Get to the hospital as soon as possible. If your group B strep test has not been done, or if you don't know if you have been tested, talk to your doctor about group B strep prevention. If you have already tested positive, remind the doctors and nurses during labor.

Can I breastfeed my baby if I am group B strep positive?

Yes. It is safe for women who are group B strep positive to breastfeed.

How is group B strep disease diagnosed and treated in newborns?

The baby will be observed to see if he or she should get extra testing or treatment if the mother received antibiotics for group B strep during labor. If the doctors suspect the baby has the infection, they will take a sample of sterile body fluid, such as blood or spinal fluid. When bacteria are grown from the cultures of those fluids, the baby can be diagnosed with group B strep. Group B strep is usually treated with antibiotics given through a vein.

If you are allergic to some antibiotics, tell your doctor or nurse during a checkup and make a plan for delivery.



Remind your doctor if you are allergic to any medicines when you get to the hospital. Even if you are allergic to some antibiotics, there are a variety of different antibiotics that can be used.



Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The Jesse Cause: Saving Babies From Group B Strep



Group B Strep Word Search

See if you can find the following words in this month's hidden word puzzle:

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|--------------|---------|
| ALLERGY | NURSE |
| ANTIBIOTICS | ONSET |
| AWARENESS | PLAN |
| BACTERIA | RISK |
| CULTURE | SEPSIS |
| DOCTOR | SPECIES |
| FAMILY | VACCINE |
| HEALTH | |
| INFECTION | |
| IRRITABILITY | |
| LABOR | |
| LINING | |
| MONTH | |

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R	G	L	C	B	T	M	E	T	E	N	P	N	L	L
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