

Group B streptococcal infection

Information brochure for pregnant women



This brochure provides information on screening for Group B streptococcal infection to help prevent possible risks to your newborn.

What is Group B streptococcal infection?

Group B strep infections (GBS) are caused by bacteria found in the vagina, rectum and bladder of many women. These bacteria are part of the normal bacterial flora. If they get into your vagina during your pregnancy, you're said to be a GBS carrier. Between 10 and 30% of women are carriers. There's no need to treat this infection if you're not pregnant.

Why is screening necessary?

GBS doesn't usually cause any problems for the mother. However, if the baby is infected, it can lead to serious, but rare, complications. If left untreated, up to 50% of mothers with GBS will pass the bacteria to their newborns.

Of these newborns, 2% will be ill. Newborns with GBS can develop several health problems, including infection of the lungs, brain, spinal cord or blood. This type of infection can be very serious, and the baby may have difficulty fighting it. It's a leading cause of illness and even death during the neonatal period. That's why pregnant women who are GBS carriers should be screened and treated.

How is the screening done?

GBS screening is done during a routine test available to all pregnant women between 35 and 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Screening is simple and painless. The doctor uses a cotton swab to take a sample from the opening of the vagina and the rectum. The cotton swab is then sent to the lab to see if the bacteria grows. This is a bacterial culture test. If the bacteria is detected, you're considered GBS positive or a carrier of the bacteria. If it's not detected, you're considered negative or non-carrier. Your doctor will get the results within a few days of the screening. They'll tell you if you're a GBS carrier or not at your next pregnancy follow-up visit.

Treatment of GBS in mothers

If you're a GBS carrier or have ever given birth to a GBS-infected baby, you'll be given intravenous antibiotics at the time of delivery or if your water breaks. Be sure to tell your doctor if you think you're allergic to antibiotics.

If you have any questions about GBS screening or treatment, feel free to write them down and ask your doctor at your next visit.

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