

GROUP B STREPTOCOCCUS AND PREGNANCY

Patient Information Sheet

What is group B streptococcus?

Group B streptococcus (group B strep) is a common bacterium that is found in the body. It is usually harmless in adults. 10 to 30% of pregnant women carry the bacterium in their vagina.

Facts about group B streptococcus

- Group B strep is not a sexually transmitted infection (STI).
- Group B strep is not the same as other types of *streptococci* bacteria, such as those that cause strep throat.
- Often, group B strep causes no symptoms or problems in adults.
- Even if you have group B strep, your baby will not necessarily be infected or develop serious illness.
- A mother who has group B strep can infect her newborn. If treated for group B strep during delivery, the risk of her baby being infected or becoming seriously ill is much reduced.

What can increase the risk?

The following are a list of risk factors which can increase your chances of passing group B strep to your newborn:

- A urinary tract infection with group B strep.
- Baby is born prematurely (earlier than 37 weeks).
- Breaking of the amniotic sac more than 18 hours before labour begins.
- Fever during labour.
- You have had another baby born with a group B strep infection.

Treatment for group B streptococcus

If your test is positive for group B strep, your hospital doctor will recommend that you have intravenous antibiotics during labour.

Effects on the baby

If group B strep is passed from a woman to her baby, the baby may develop group B strep infection. This may happen to 1 or 2 of every 100 babies whose mothers have group B strep. This infection can occasionally cause serious illness such as inflammation to the baby's blood, lungs, brain or spinal cord.

Babies of women who are carriers of group B strep and do not have antibiotic treatment have more than 20 times the risk of getting infected than those who do have treatment.

Group B strep testing

Testing for Group B Strep is usually done between 35 and 37 weeks of pregnancy. You will be provided with a sterile swab and instructions to enable you to collect a sample from your vagina and rectum. If you do not feel comfortable with this you may ask your hospital doctor or midwife to do the test for you. The test is simple and should not hurt. The samples are then sent to a laboratory. The results show whether you have group B strep bacteria in your genital area.

These test results cannot say whether or not your baby will become infected with group B strep.

Your pregnancy

If you carry group B strep there is a risk of your baby becoming infected during birth, especially if other risk factors occur. However, you can be treated during labour.

Discuss any questions you have about group B strep with your hospital doctor or midwife.