



Information for patients
and carers

Vitamin K

Introduction

Shortly after your baby is born you will be asked whether you wish your baby to receive a dose of vitamin K as recommended by the Department of Health. This leaflet explains the reasons for this. You are advised to read the leaflet before your baby's birth in case you have any questions and so that you can come to an unhurried decision.

What is vitamin K?

The liver needs Vitamin K to make several proteins that are essential for clotting of the blood. At birth all newborn babies have low levels of vitamin K in the blood and these levels can get used up very quickly in the first few days of life. While it is not clear why low levels of vitamin K occur, this can leave a baby vulnerable to severe bleeding, and rarely, a baby can develop a condition called Vitamin K deficiency bleeding (VKDB).

Why should my baby be given vitamin K?

Your newborn baby will not be eating a wide range of foods and the amount of vitamin K in breastmilk is relatively small. It will also take time for your baby's gut to become colonised by vitamin K producing bacteria. These factors increase the risk of your baby suffering from VKDB. Giving newborn babies vitamin K supplements very effectively reduces the risk of VKDB.

It is impossible to accurately identify all the babies that will suffer from VKDB. However, some risk factors are known:

- Prematurity
- Complicated birth, such as a forceps delivery.
- Use of certain drugs during pregnancy, in particular, epilepsy medication
- Liver disease
- Failure to take or absorb feeds adequately
- Other illness

What are the risks of VKDB?

VKDB in a newborn baby can lead to bleeding from the nose, mouth or even into the brain. When bleeding occurs in the brain it can cause permanent damage and sometimes death. VKDB is however very rare and, even if vitamin K supplements were not given, it would occur in only 1 in 10,000 full term births. In the UK, where there are approximately 800,000 births each year, this would mean that 10 to 20 babies could be brain damaged and between 4 and 6 babies might die each year.

How is vitamin K given to babies?

It is given either by injection or by mouth (orally).

Does it make any difference whether vitamin K is given by injection or by mouth?

- If vitamin K is given by injection only one dose is needed. This would be given into your baby's leg (intramuscularly), shortly after birth.
- When vitamin K is given by mouth additional doses are needed to give the same level of protection against VKDB. A breastfed baby is given three doses: at birth, 7 days and 28 days. A formula fed baby is given two doses: at birth and 7 days (vitamin K is added to formula milk during its manufacture)

You can choose which method you prefer, although if your baby has any of the risk factors for VKDB you will be advised to opt for the injection.

Are there any risks associated with giving vitamin K to newborn babies?

In 1992 a small research study showed a possible link between injections of vitamin K and childhood cancer. Various large studies carried out since this time, have not shown any increase in risk. The Department of Health, having assessed the research, recommends parents to consent to vitamin K supplements for their newborn babies.

What if I decide against giving vitamin K to my baby?

Your decision will be recorded in your baby's medical records and your midwife or doctor will document that they have discussed the issue fully with you.

You should be aware of the signs of VKDB and if your baby shows any of these signs you should report them to your doctor urgently:

- Bleeding from the nose or mouth
- Unexplained bruising
- Jaundice that lasts beyond the first two weeks of life, particularly if your baby seems unwell, is not gaining weight, has dark urine or pale stools.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact your midwife, doctor or health visitor.

Maternity services contact numbers:

Antenatal clinic, Sharoe Green Unit - 01772 524448

Antenatal clinic, Chorley & South Ribble Hospital - 01257 245113

Triage, Sharoe Green Unit - 01772 524495

Community Midwives - 01257 245116

Preston Birth Centre - 01772 528223

Chorley Birth Centre - 01257 245116

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.patient.co.uk

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Please ask if you would like help in understanding this information. This information can be made available in large print and in other languages.

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If you want to stop smoking you can also contact the Quit Squad Freephone 0800 328 6297.

Cantonese:

如果你希望以另外一種格式接收該資訊，請和我們聯絡，不必猶豫。

Gujarati:

જો તમને આ માહિતી બીજી રચના કે ફોર્મેટમાં મેળવવાની ઈચ્છા હોય, તો કૃપા કરી અમારો સંપર્ક કરતા અચકાશો નહિ.

Hungarian:

Kérjük, vegye fel velünk a kapcsolatot, ha más formában kéri ezt az információt.

Polish:

Jeżeli chciał(a)by Pan/Pani otrzymać niniejsze informacje w innym formacie, prosimy o kontakt.

Punjabi:

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਫਾਰਮੈਟ ਵਿਚ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰਨ ਤੋਂ ਨਾ ਝਿਜਕੋ।

Urdu:

اگر آپ اس معلومات کو کسی اور صورت میں حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کرنے میں ہچکچاہٹ محسوس نہ کریں۔

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Division: Maternity

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