**Infections in newborn babies (1 of 2)**

This is a leaflet to help mothers to check their babies for possible infections in the period after birth.

**Bacterial infections**

Infections can be caused by different types of germs such as bacteria, viruses and fungi. Bacterial infection is a major cause of illness in newborn babies but they can be treated with antibiotics.

**What are the symptoms of infection?**

Early signs of infection (in the first 48 hours of life) in a newborn baby are:
- difficulty with breathing – this may be fast breathing, noisy breathing (such as grunting) or signs like flaring of the baby’s nostrils
- poor feeding
- being abnormally drowsy or lethargic
- unstable temperature (high or low).

Later signs of infection (after the first 48 hours of life) in a newborn baby include all of the above, plus:
- vomiting or refusing feeds
- high pitched, whimpering cry
- fast heart rate
- pale blotchy skin
- baby is floppy and may dislike being handled
- baby sometimes has a stiff body or jerking movements.

**Are some newborn babies more likely to get a bacterial infection?**

All newborn babies are born with bacteria around them, most of which are usually harmless. Some babies are more likely to develop an infection if:
- they are born prematurely (after less than 37 weeks gestation)
- the membranes are broken for more than 24 hours before the baby is born
- the mother has an infection in her blood, urine or birth canal before baby’s birth.

---

**Labour Ward**

01722 425188
What do I do if I am worried my baby might have an infection?

Babies with infections can deteriorate quickly. Do Not delay in calling for help
1. Contact your GP or midwife at once
2. If your GP is unavailable and you remain worried then take your baby to the emergency department at the hospital.

What tests will be done on my baby?

If your baby has a suspected bacterial infection then your baby will be assessed by the paediatric team. They will assess your baby and are likely to consider undertaking investigations such as blood tests. Further tests may be considered and will be discussed with you.

Can infections be treated?

Bacterial infections are treated with antibiotics. In newborn babies the baby is likely to be treated with antibiotics early if there are any concerns regarding possible infections. The antibiotics are very safe and effective. However, depending on the infection they have, some babies can become very ill and have major complications from bacterial infections in the newborn period.

What is Group B Streptococcus?

There are several types of bacteria which cause infections in the newborn period and one of these is Group B Streptococcus (GBS). GBS is a very common bacterium which occurs naturally in many people, from babies to the elderly, and usually it causes no harm or symptoms. Carrying GBS is entirely normal (up to one in every three people carry it in their gut and in women it is also found in the vagina).

GBS can cause infection. GBS infection is the commonest bacterial infection in the newborn period and occurs in approximately one in every 1000 births in the UK.

GBS infection causes the same symptoms of illness in your baby as those described above and most often causes breathing symptoms in the first 12 hours of life.

How can I get more information about newborn infections?

Please ask one of your midwives, or a member of the obstetric or paediatric team.