



GROUP B STREP (GBS) IN PREGNANCY

What is Group B Strep (GBS)?

GBS is one of many normal bacteria that live in the human body without causing harm. It lives in the intestines, but often travels into the vagina. It is present in the vagina of 15-40% of healthy women at any given time. There are no signs or symptoms of GBS in the vagina, and it is not harmful. It may also be present in urine without signs or symptoms. If GBS is present in urine at any time during pregnancy, it is recommended to treat the mother with antibiotics in labour, as well as at the time the bacteria is found.

How does GBS cause infection?

If a baby is exposed to GBS in the birth canal, it can make baby sick. The bacteria may go through skin or mucous membranes (like gums) and cause pneumonia or a blood infection. Without treatment, an estimated 1%–2% of babies born to colonized mothers develop GBS infections.

How do I know if I have GBS?

At 35-37 weeks of pregnancy, your midwife will offer a swab to test for the GBS bacteria in your vagina. It is a simple test you do yourself during your clinic visit. Results are available in a few days.

How is GBS treated?

The recommendation is to treat GBS with antibiotics in labour. The antibiotics would be administered through an IV. If you don't need an IV for any other reason during labour, then the IV can be "locked", which means you only are attached to the IV pole for about 15 minutes every 4 hours. When a woman with GBS receives IV antibiotics at least four hours before her baby is born, the chance that the baby will become sick with GBS is very small. As a result of prevention efforts, incidence of GBS has declined dramatically over the past 15 years, from 1.7 cases per 1,000 live births in the early 1990s to **0.34–0.37 cases per 1,000 live births in recent years**. Treatment should begin either a) when your water breaks, or b) when you are in active labour.

How will I know if my baby is sick with GBS?

Babies who get sick from infection with GBS almost always do so in the first 24-48 hours after birth. Symptoms include difficult breathing (including grunting or having poor color), problems maintaining temperature (too cold or too hot), or extreme sleepiness that interferes with nursing.

What are the risk factors for GBS disease?

Risk factors are: mom who had a previous infant with GBS disease, GBS in the urine during pregnancy, preterm (before 37 weeks) birth, rupture of membranes longer than 18 hours, positive swab for GBS, and a temperature of greater than 38 degrees during labour. If any of these factors are present, your midwife may recommend IV antibiotics in labour.