

What is Strep B?

Strep B is one of many types of common bacteria which live in our bodies and usually cause no harm to the person carrying it.

Why is it being talked about in pregnancy?

Strep B is found in around 1 in 4 pregnant women. Because the bacteria live in the woman's intestines, rectum and vagina (but it's **not** a sexually-transmitted disease), it's likely that her baby will come into contact with Strep B during labour and birth. Although most of these babies will be completely fine, there's a small chance that the baby could develop Strep B infection.

What effect will Strep B have on a baby?

About 1 in 1,750 babies will become ill with Strep B in the first few days after birth. Most babies will be successfully treated with antibiotics, but sadly some die or are left with long-term health issues. It's important to spot the signs of Strep B as it can cause sepsis, pneumonia and meningitis in babies. Only in very rare cases will Strep B affect a baby during the pregnancy.

How does mum find out she if has Strep B?

At the moment, Strep B is not routinely tested for during pregnancy, although you may discover that mum is a carrier as a result of another test or because it was found during or following a previous pregnancy. If you're concerned about Strep B, then do speak with your Midwife or your GP for more information.

How will Strep B affect labour and birth?

If baby's mum is known to carry Strep B, the midwife will offer her antibiotics intravenously (i.e. via a drip or 'IV') as soon as possible once labour has started, and ideally for at least four hours before her baby is born. Where this happens, the baby will not usually need any additional treatment or monitoring after birth. If the antibiotics were not given for four hours before birth – e.g. when baby is born quickly – then baby will be monitored for signs of possible infection for at least 12 hours following the birth. Babies are only monitored if they are considered to be at higher risk of developing Strep B infection.

How will I know if my baby has been infected?

Most Strep B infections will be spotted very soon after birth, whilst you're still in hospital. However, symptoms can occasionally develop later, up to three months after birth. If your baby displays any of these symptoms, then you are advised to dial 999 or take baby to your nearest Accident and Emergency Department ASAP:

Symptoms

- floppy and unresponsive
- grunting whilst breathing
- a very high or low temperature
- very fast or slow breathing
- very fast or slow heart rate

Find out more

You can find more information on the symptoms of Group Strep B infection in babies via:
<https://gbss.org.uk/info-support/group-b-strep-infection/group-b-strep-infection-in-babies-know-the-symptoms/>.

Sources of further information:
<https://gbss.org.uk/> - Group B Strep Support website
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/group-b-strep/> - NHS Group B Strep information page
<https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/patients/patient-information-leaflets/pregnancy/pi-gbs-pregnancy-newborn.pdf> - Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' Patient Information Leaflet on Group B Strep in pregnancy and newborn babies