

## **What is Newborn Jaundice?**

### **PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **What is newborn jaundice?**

Jaundice is a yellow or pumpkin-colored appearance to the skin. It occurs in about 50 – 60 % of all newborns and it occurs in babies of any race or ethnicity.

#### **What causes newborn jaundice?**

It is caused by a build-up of yellow pigment called bilirubin found in the blood and removed by the liver and then passed from the body in bowel movements. Prior to birth the mother's liver removes the bilirubin for the newborn. After birth the newborn's liver may be too immature to process and remove all of the newborn's bilirubin.

#### **How can I tell if my newborn has jaundice?**

The skin of the newborn with jaundice appears yellow. The best way to see jaundice is in good light, such as sunlight or under fluorescent lights. It is more difficult to see in babies with darker skin color. Jaundice usually appears first in the face then moves to the chest, abdomen, arms, and legs as the bilirubin levels get higher. The whites of the eyes may also be yellow.

#### **How do you check for jaundice?**

Your healthcare team will always be observing for jaundice. All infants in the newborn nursery will be screened for jaundice using a skin device or blood test to measure the level of bilirubin. The results of the test vary depending upon the newborn's age and the amount of bilirubin.

#### **Can jaundice harm by newborn?**

Most newborns have mild jaundice that is harmless, but in some situations the bilirubin level is too high and might cause serious neurologic problems. This is why newborns should be checked carefully for jaundice.

## **How is jaundice treated?**

Even though jaundice generally does not require treatment, you may be asked to return to the hospital or your healthcare provider's office for follow-up care. If necessary, your healthcare provider may treat the newborn's jaundice using phototherapy, which is placing the newborn in a crib under special lights, while the newborn's eyes and diaper area is covered. Phototherapy will not cause your newborn to experience any discomfort and will lower the bilirubin level.

## **Can I breastfeed if my newborn is jaundice?**

If you have been breastfeeding, you can continue to breastfeed if your newborn becomes jaundiced. Breast milk is the ideal food for your newborn. It is important to breastfeed at least 8 times a day around the clock. Your pediatrician may recommend a supplement after your breastfeeding session of 30cc or 1 ounce of formula.

## **When should my newborn be checked after leaving the hospital?**

It is important for your newborn to be seen by a healthcare provider between 3 to 5 days of age. This is when a newborn's bilirubin is usually highest. The maternity nurses at Greenwich Hospital will arrange for you to have a postpartum visit within 3 days of discharge through the Greenwich Hospital Postpartum Visit Program. Your newborn will be examined, weighed, and evaluated for jaundice.

After you are discharged, you must also call your pediatrician's office for a follow-up visit.

If you do not wish to return for a postpartum visit at Greenwich Hospital Postpartum Visit Program, then it is important that your newborn be evaluated by your pediatrician in 3 to 5 days of age. Please call your pediatrician to schedule a follow-up visit.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics; [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

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