

What is Group B streptococcus (Group B Strep) During Pregnancy?

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is Group B Strep?

Group B streptococcus, also called Group B Strep or GBS, is a common type of bacteria found in the vagina and rectum of many healthy women. This type of bacteria does not usually cause problems in adults, but if the mother is a carrier, the bacteria may be passed from mother to baby during birth.

Why do I need to get tested for Group B Strep?

It is important to have the test done between the 35th to 37th weeks of pregnancy, because women who are carriers of GBS will not have any symptoms. The test for GBS is simple, harmless, and usually done in the ob/gyn's office. A special swab or Q-tip is placed in the vagina and rectum and then sent to the lab to see if there are any GBS bacteria present. If your test is positive for the bacteria, *it does not mean that your baby or you will become sick with an infection.* However, there is a risk that the bacteria can be passed to your baby during birth.

What happens to babies born to mothers who are carriers of the Group B Strep bacteria?

Most women who are GBS carriers will have healthy babies. In some cases, however, the bacteria can cause infection in your baby's blood, lungs (pneumonia) or brain (meningitis) after the baby is born. Some babies can become quite sick.

How can Group B Strep disease in babies be prevented?

Most early onset GBS disease in newborn babies can be prevented by giving intravenous antibiotics during labor to women who tested positive during their last trimester. Antibiotics should also be given to women who have:

- not been tested during this pregnancy
- had a baby in the past with GBS disease
- a urinary tract infection caused by GBS while in labor

If I know that I'm a GBS carrier, why can't I just take antibiotics now?

Antibiotics before labor are not effective because the bacteria will come back after antibiotic treatment. However, antibiotics during labor are effective at protecting your baby because they greatly reduce the amount of bacteria the baby is exposed to during labor and delivery.

What if I'm allergic to some antibiotics?

Women who are allergic to some antibiotics, such as penicillin, can still get other types of antibiotics. If you think you are allergic to any antibiotic, notify your doctor.

What can I expect if I'm GBS positive and pregnant?

Your doctor will discuss a labor plan that includes getting antibiotics for GBS prevention in your newborn baby. When you go into labor or your water breaks, make sure you call your doctor. Ideally, you would like to be at the hospital at least four hours before delivery to make sure there is enough time for the antibiotics to work. When you get to the hospital, remind the staff that you are group B strep positive.

GBS is a treatable condition that responds well to the procedure described.

Source: www.cdc.gov/groupbstrep
www.acog.org/publications/patient_education

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