

Group B Streptococcal Disease (GBS)

What is Group B Streptococcal Disease (GBS)?

Group B streptococcus (GBS) is a bacteria that causes infection. The bacteria can be found in the throat, bladder, vagina or bowel. Many people carry group B strep but do not get sick.

About 10 to 30 percent of pregnant women carry the group B strep bacteria. The bacteria can be transferred to the baby during child-birth. More than 90 percent of these babies do not get sick. GBS is the most common cause of life-threatening infections in newborns and can cause:

- sepsis (blood infection)
- meningitis (infection of spinal and brain fluid)
- bone and joint infection
- pneumonia (lung infection)
- skin and soft tissue infections.

Who Can Get GBS?

Anyone can get GBS. People most at risk include:

- newborns
- pregnant women
- older adults (elderly)
- adults who have other conditions such as diabetes or liver disease.

Newborns can be affected hours after birth (known as early-onset disease) to months after birth (known as late-onset disease). GBS is common among older adults who live in nursing homes or who are bedridden in the hospital.

How can GBS be Spread?

Group B strep can be spread from mother to baby during birth. Among non-pregnant adults, Group B strep can be acquired after a recent trauma or after having surgery.

Group B strep cannot be spread during breastfeeding or during sexual intercourse.

What are Symptoms of GBS in Newborns?

Symptoms of early-onset GBS in newborns are:

- fever
- problems feeding
- irritability
- limpness, lethargy
- difficulty breathing, blue-ish skin color.

If your baby shows any of those signs, call your health care provider right away.

(over)

What are Symptoms of GBS in Pregnant Women?

Symptoms of GBS in pregnant women are:

- womb infections
- bladder infection
- stillbirth.

What are Symptoms of GBS in Non-pregnant Adults?

Symptoms of GBS in men and non-pregnant women are:

- blood infections
- skin infections
- pneumonia.

How is GBS Found?

Your health care provider will take a sample of body fluids (such as blood or spinal fluid) to test.

How is GBS Treated?

- **Newborns:** GBS infections are usually treated with antibiotics (penicillin) given in an injection (shot).
- **Adults:** GBS infections are usually treated with antibiotics given in an injection (shot). If you have soft tissue or a bone infection, you may need surgery. Talk with your health care provider about your treatment options.

What are the Possible Side Effects of GBS?

- **Newborns:** GBS can cause life-threatening conditions such as deafness or developmental disabilities.
- **Adults:** If the GBS gets into parts of the body bacteria isn't normally found (such as the blood, muscles or lungs), it can cause pneumonia or infections in the blood, skin, bone and joints.

What Prevents the Spread of the Germ?

The following can help prevent the spread of the group B strep bacteria.

- If you are pregnant and tested positive for group B strep during pregnancy, you will be given antibiotics (medicine) through an intravenous (IV) line in your hand or arm during labor. These antibiotics will kill some of the bacteria that could be harmful to the baby during birth.
- If you are pregnant and do not know if you have group B strep, you will be treated with antibiotics if you have premature labor, prolonged rupture of membranes, fever before or during labor, or if you have a history of group B strep in another birth.

How Long Should Infected People Stay Home From Work or School?

You do not need to stay home from work or school unless you are not feeling well from the infection.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Minnesota Department of Health and Wisconsin Department of Health.