



Medications for Baby at Birth

Vitamin K

Vitamin K helps blood to clot. It is essential to prevent serious bleeding.

Babies do not get enough vitamin K from their mothers during pregnancy, or when they are breast feeding. Without vitamin K, they are at risk of getting a rare disorder called Vitamin K Deficiency bleeding, or VKDB. VKDB can cause bleeding into the brain, which can result in brain damage or even death. VKDB can be prevented by giving new babies extra vitamin K. By the age of about six months, they have built up their own supply.

How is Vitamin K given?

Since about 1980, most newborn babies in Australia have been given vitamin K. The easiest and most reliable way to give babies vitamin K is by injection. One injection just after birth will protect a baby for many months. Vitamin K can also be given by mouth. Because vitamin K is not absorbed as well when it is given by mouth, three oral doses are essential to give enough protection. After the liquid is placed in the baby's mouth, it is best to follow the dose with a feed, to ensure it is swallowed. If your baby vomits within 1 hour of swallowing the vitamin K, the baby will need to have another dose.

If you choose vitamin K by mouth, your baby must have three doses:

- Dose 1: at birth
- Dose 2: 3 to 5 days old and
- Dose 3: 4 weeks old

Can all babies have Vitamin K?

All babies need to have vitamin K. Very small or premature babies may need smaller doses- your doctor can advise you about this.

Vitamin K by mouth is not suitable for some babies.

- Sick and premature babies have difficulty in sucking and absorbing oral feeds or medications. Premature babies are at a higher risk of bleeding.
- If you choose vitamin K by mouth, but your baby is unwell when a dose is due, the baby may need to have the injection instead.
- If, while you are pregnant, you took medication for epilepsy, blood clots or tuberculosis, you should tell your doctor or midwife. Your baby may not be able to absorb vitamin K by mouth, and may need the injection instead.

Does Vitamin K have any side effects?

Over the 20 years vitamin K has been given to new babies in Australia, there has been no documented ill effects.

A few years ago, one study suggested that injections of vitamin K might be linked to childhood cancer, but 6 studies since could not find any link with cancer. The National Health and Medical Research Council has looked carefully at these studies and other evidence available and has concluded that vitamin K is not associated with childhood cancer, whether it is given by injection or by mouth.



Does my baby have to have Vitamin K?

This is your choice. However, giving vitamin K to your newborn baby is a simple way of preventing a very serious disease. Medical authorities in Australia strongly recommend that all babies be given vitamin K. This includes babies who are premature or sick, and babies having surgery (including circumcision). Parents who decided against vitamin K need to watch very carefully for any symptoms of VKDB.

What should I look out for?

You should always see your doctor or health care worker:

- If your baby has any unexplained bleeding or bruising. This is particularly important if your baby has not had vitamin K.
- If your baby is over three weeks old, and there are any signs of jaundice ie yellow colouring of the skin or whites of the eyes.
- Babies with liver problems are particularly at risk, even if they have had vitamin K.

How do I get Vitamin K for my baby?

During pregnancy, your doctor or midwife should ask whether you want your baby to have Vitamin K by injection or by mouth, and then they will arrange to provide it.

Soon after birth, your baby will have a Vitamin K injection or the first dose by mouth.

This will be given by a midwife. If you choose vitamin K by mouth:

- The 2nd oral dose can be given when your baby has the newborn screening test at 3-4 days of age
- You need to remember the important 3rd dose when your baby is between 3 and 4 weeks old by your local doctor or health care worker.

You will be given a vitamin K pack on discharge to take with you. The pack or ampoule is to be kept in a cool dry place where the temperature stays below 25 degrees C (not in fridge door). Make sure that your baby's vitamin K doses are recorded in the baby's personal health record.

Hepatitis B Vaccine

All newborn babies are offered hepatitis B vaccine at birth to:

Prevent the spread of the disease from an infected mother to her baby. Sometimes a mother may not know she has the disease.

Prevent the spread of the disease in the first months of life from infected people who live in the same house or others who might be infected.

Help baby build immunity against Hepatitis B as it grows into an adult.

Hepatitis B Vaccination Schedule

It is recommended that your baby is given a dose of hepatitis B vaccine at birth or within the first 7 days of life, followed by a further three doses of hepatitis B vaccine at 6 weeks, 4 months and 6 months of age.

Hepatitis B Vaccine Safety

Extensive experience shows that hepatitis B vaccine is safe and well tolerated by newborn babies. The most common side effects of the vaccine are minor and include redness and swelling at the injection site. Hepatitis B vaccine does not interfere with breastfeeding.

Hepatitis B

The hepatitis B virus can cause long term liver disease such as cirrhosis of the liver and cancer. Infants who become infected with hepatitis B have a 90% chance of developing a lifelong chronic infection. Hepatitis B is very infectious and can easily spread through:



- an infected mother passing it to her baby at birth
- skin puncture with unclean items such as needles and razors
- direct contact between an infected person's blood and an open wound e.g. abrasions and cuts

Testing in Pregnancy

All women should be tested for hepatitis B infection during routine pregnancy screening. If the test is positive the baby will need treatment to prevent infection and the risk of chronic liver disease. Treatment may also be recommended for the mother.

Prevention

Hepatitis B vaccine has been used in Australia since the early 1980s and vaccination is the best way to prevent the disease.

Treatment of Babies Born to Hepatitis B Positive Mothers As well as being offered a dose of hepatitis B vaccine at birth, a baby who is born to a mother with hepatitis B infection will also be offered a medication called 'hepatitis B immunoglobulin' within 12 hours of birth to provide added protection. It is essential that the full course of hepatitis B vaccine is also completed for long term protection.

Further Testing of Babies Born to Hepatitis B Positive Mothers

A baby who is born to a mother with hepatitis B infection needs a blood test 3 months after completing the hepatitis B vaccination course to check if they are protected. You and your doctor may be sent a reminder letter from NSW Health

Contact your doctor or midwife, or child and family health nurse for more information.

References

NSW Health website

www.health.nsw.gov.au/immunisation

Australian Government Department of Health website

www.health.gov.au

The National Centre for Immunisation Research & Surveillance (NCIRS)

www.ncirs.edu.au/about/index.php

NCIRS Hepatitis B factsheet

www.ncirs.edu.au/immunisation/fact-sheets/hepatitis-B-fact-sheet.pdf

Australian Childhood Immunisation Register website

www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/australian-childhood-immunisation-register

NSW Immunisation Schedule

Visit the NSW Health website to view the current NSW Immunisation Schedule, at

www.health.nsw.gov.au/immunisation/Pages/schedule.aspx