

Group B Strep during Pregnancy

What is group B strep?

Group B strep is an infection caused by a type of bacteria called beta strep, group B streptococcus, or GBS. Group B strep is different from the bacteria that cause strep throat.

If you are pregnant and infected with beta strep, your baby could get infected and very sick.

What is the cause?

GBS bacteria often live in the mouth, intestines, bladder, vagina, and rectum. The bacteria are usually harmless for adults. Sometimes the bacteria cause an infection in the uterus, bladder, or kidneys, or, rarely, in the brain. This is more likely if you have diabetes or liver disease.

A baby can get infected during labor and delivery.

What are the symptoms?

Most pregnant women infected with GBS have no symptoms of infection. When the infection does cause symptoms, they may include:

- Fever
- Painful, bloody, frequent, or urgent urination

If your baby is infected, symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Trouble breathing

How is it diagnosed?

GBS can be found by testing urine or fluid from the cervix, vagina, or rectum.

If you are pregnant, you should have a GBS test:

- In the 35th to 37th weeks of pregnancy
- If you have premature rupture of the membranes (water breaking before 37 weeks of pregnancy)
- If you have a fever during labor
- If you have symptoms such as painful, bloody, or frequent urination

You will also have a GBS test when you go to the hospital to deliver your baby.

How is it treated?

If the bacteria are causing an infection in the uterus, bladder, kidneys, or brain, you may be treated with an antibiotic.

If you are pregnant and the GBS test is positive but you have no signs of an active infection, you will probably not be treated with antibiotics until you are in labor. Treatment with IV antibiotics during labor is usually very effective. Babies rarely develop the serious problems of GBS infection with this treatment.

If your test results are negative, you may be given IV antibiotics during labor if you have risk factors, such as:

- Preterm labor (labor that starts before 37 weeks of pregnancy)
- Premature rupture of membranes
- Membranes ruptured for longer than 18 hours
- A previous child with beta strep infection

If a newborn shows signs or symptoms of GBS infection, the baby will be treated with IV antibiotics and watched very closely. The baby may stay in a special intensive care unit. The infection can affect the baby's blood, brain, spinal cord, or lungs. The baby may have long-term problems that affect hearing, vision, or learning abilities. If the infection is very serious, the baby might die.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. Ask your provider:

- How and when you will hear your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- What activities you should avoid and when you can return to your normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

How can I help prevent GBS infection of the baby?

Getting tested for GBS and being treated with antibiotics, if needed, greatly lowers the risk that your baby will be infected with GBS.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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