

## Frequently Asked Questions

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What is group B streptococcus?

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Why is group B streptococcus a concern for pregnant women?

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- What is group B streptococcus?

Group B streptococcus (GBS) is one of the many bacteria that live in the body. It usually does not cause serious illness, and it is not a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Also, although the names are similar, GBS is different from group A streptococcus, the bacteria that causes “strep throat.”

- Why is group B streptococcus a concern for pregnant women?

In women, GBS most often is found in the vagina and rectum. This means that GBS can pass from a pregnant woman to her fetus during labor. This is rare and happens to 1 or 2 babies out of 100 when the mother does not receive treatment with antibiotics during labor. The chance of a newborn getting sick is much lower when the mother receives treatment.

- How can group B streptococcus affect a newborn?

Even though it is rare for a baby to get GBS, it can be very serious when it happens. Babies who get GBS may have early-onset or late-onset disease.

- What is early-onset disease?

With early-onset disease, a baby typically gets sick within 12 to 48 hours after birth or up to the first 7 days. Early-onset disease can cause severe problems, such as

- inflammation of the covering of the brain or spinal cord (meningitis)
- infection of the lungs (pneumonia)
- infection in the blood (sepsis)

A small number of babies with early-onset disease die even with immediate treatment.

- What is late-onset disease?

With late-onset disease, a baby gets sick between a week to a few months after birth. The disease is usually caused by contact with the mother after delivery if she is infected. But it can come from other sources too, such as contact with other people who have GBS.

Late-onset disease also is serious and can cause meningitis. In newborns, the signs and symptoms of meningitis can be hard to spot. Contact your baby's health care professional right away if your baby has any signs or symptoms of disease, including:

- Lack of energy
- Irritability
- Poor feeding
- High fever
- Will I be tested for group B streptococcus?

Yes, pregnant women are screened for GBS as part of routine prenatal care. The test for GBS is called a culture. It is now done between 36 and 38 weeks of pregnancy. In this test, a swab is used to take a sample from the vagina and rectum.

- What if the test result is positive?

If the results show that GBS is present, most women will receive antibiotics through an intravenous (IV) line once labor has started. This is done to help protect the fetus from being infected. The best time for treatment is during labor. Penicillin is the antibiotic that is most often given to prevent early-onset disease in newborns. While treatment with antibiotics during labor can help prevent early-onset GBS disease in a baby, this treatment does not prevent late-onset disease.

- What if I am allergic to penicillin?

If you are allergic to penicillin, tell your health care professional before you are tested for GBS. You may have a skin test to determine the severity of your allergies. If needed, other antibiotics can be used.

- Are there times when antibiotics are given without testing first?

In some cases, women are automatically given antibiotics during labor without testing for GBS. Antibiotics may be given without testing if:

- You had a previous child who had GBS disease
- You have GBS bacteria in your urine at any point during your pregnancy
- Your GBS status is not known when you go into labor and you have a fever
- Your GBS status is not known and you go into labor before 37 weeks
- Your GBS status is not known and it has been 18 hours or more since your water broke
- Your GBS status for this pregnancy is not known but you tested positive for GBS in a past pregnancy
- What if I plan to have a cesarean birth?

Women who have a cesarean birth do not need to be given antibiotics for GBS during delivery if their labor has not started and the amniotic sac has not ruptured (their water has not broken). But these women should still be tested for GBS because labor may happen before a cesarean birth. If the test result is positive, the baby may need to be monitored for GBS disease after birth.

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