

GUIDE

Obstetrical Health Promotion

Group B Streptococcus



The Ottawa Hospital | L'Hôpital
d'Ottawa

Disclaimer

This is general information developed by The Ottawa Hospital. It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified health-care provider. Please consult your own personal physician who will be able to determine if this information is appropriate for your specific situation.

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What is Group B Streptococcus?

Group B Streptococcus (GBS) is a bacteria carried by approximately 15 to 40 per cent of pregnant women. It is commonly found in the vagina and rectum.

Many women have this bacteria with no clinical symptoms, and are called *carriers*.

How will I know I have GBS?

A very simple test may be done at specific times throughout a pregnancy. A vaginal/rectal swab is taken by the nurse or physician. It is sent to the lab for testing. Test results will be available within three days.

Can my baby get GBS?

The risk is very low (about one per cent in carriers). Babies of carriers can be infected during the birth process.

Some factors that increase the risk of babies getting GBS are:

- GBS present in urine
- premature labour before 37 weeks
- prolonged rupture of membranes over 12 hours
- fever during labour
- multiple pregnancy
- previous newborn with GBS

Can GBS affect my baby?

Yes. Early onset of GBS can be apparent within six hours of birth. Your baby may experience breathing problems. This is often the first sign of infection.

What treatment is available?

The physician may order intravenous antibiotics to give you during labour to prevent onset of GBS in the baby.

After birth, if the baby is suspected of having GBS, tests will be done to confirm the diagnosis. Antibiotics will be given to the baby in order to treat the infection.

Can GBS be prevented?

No. Although efforts are being made to develop a vaccine, it is not available at present.

When antibiotics are given during labour, it is thought to interrupt the transfer of GBS to the baby.

Can others in my family get GBS?

Yes. If you are a carrier, your sexual partner may also carry this bacteria. This is not a concern as there are usually no symptoms.

Although GBS is not a threat to the adult it could be a problem to the baby at risk.

What if I have more questions about GBS?

Your physician or nurse will be happy to discuss GBS further with you.

