



Further information

If you would like more information, talk to your lead maternity carer (LMC).



Group B Streptococcus (GBS) infection

What you need to know

What is GBS?

GBS (Group B Streptococcus) is present in about 10-35% of women. It is part of the normal mixture of bacteria that live on and in the body and can come and go. Women who carry GBS usually have no symptoms.

If GBS is present, your baby can pick up the bacteria during labour or birth – even if you have no symptoms. Occasionally, this may cause a life-threatening illness for your baby.

Should I be screened for GBS in pregnancy?

Routine screening in pregnancy is not currently recommended in New Zealand, although you may be offered screening if you are having other tests.

Will I need preventive treatment?

If you have not been screened in pregnancy, we recommend that you receive antibiotics in labour if:

- you have had a positive GBS swab or urine test in this pregnancy
- your labour starts before 37 weeks
- your waters have broken (ruptured membranes) for than longer than 18 hours
- you have a temperature in labour of 38°C or more.

Your LMC will advise you if you need antibiotics.

The antibiotics must be given intravenously (into a vein) and they must be given at least four hours before your baby is born.

If you are planning an elective caesarean, you will receive antibiotics during the surgery but no additional antibiotics will be needed.

Will my baby need special treatment?

If your baby has risk factors for GBS infection, we recommend that you remain in hospital (or a primary birthing unit) for 48 hours after the birth.

During this time, the staff will monitor your baby at least every four hours to check their temperature, pulse and breathing.

If you received your antibiotics on time and if baby is well, you may be able to go home after 24 hours and keep a close watch on your baby at home.

If your baby develops symptoms and becomes unwell during this period, more tests will be needed straight away and your baby will be treated with antibiotics. Your baby may need to stay in hospital for one or two extra days.

What do I need to look out for in my baby?

A baby who is developing a GBS infection may have vague symptoms such as:

- floppiness
- drowsiness
- fever
- rapid breathing (more than 60 breaths a minute)
- rasping or grunting sounds
- restlessness or difficulty settling
- reluctance to feed.

If your baby has any of these symptoms, or if you feel your baby is unwell, take your baby to a doctor immediately and make sure you tell the doctor that your baby is at risk of GBS.

Late onset GBS

GBS infection in newborns most commonly occurs in the first 48 hours however there is a condition called “late onset GBS” which can occur weeks after the birth.

Whilst the vast majority of babies remain well, you should be aware of the possibility of late infection and seek urgent advice from your doctor day or night if any of the above symptoms develop.