GROUP B STREPTOCOCCUS (GBS)

FACT SHEET

What is group B *Streptococcus*?

Group B *Streptococcus* (also called group B strep or GBS) is a common type of bacteria often carried in the intestines or lower genital tract. Usually group B strep is not serious for adults, but it can cause severe illness in newborns.

How is GBS spread?

Many healthy people carry group B strep bacteria in their bodies. Group B strep bacteria aren't sexually transmitted, and the bacteria isn't spread through food or water. How the bacteria are spread to anyone other than newborns isn't known.

Pregnant women can pass the infection to their infants during labor and delivery.

What are the signs and symptoms of group B strep?

Group B strep can cause infections in the blood, lungs, skin, or bones. Symptoms depend on the part of the body that is infected and are different in newborns compared to people of other ages who get group B strep disease. Symptoms may include fever, chills, rapid breathing, chest pain, red, swollen and painful skin, and inability to use your affected limb (arm/leg).

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

The two types of group B strep disease in infants are:

- Early-onset infections, which happen during the first week of life. Infants often have symptoms within 24 hours of birth.
- Late-onset infections, which develop weeks to months after birth. This type of group B strep disease is not well understood.

Who is most at risk?

An infant is at increased risk of developing group B strep disease if:

- The mother carries group B strep in her body,
- The baby is born prematurely (earlier than 37 weeks),
- The mother's water breaks 18 hours or more before delivery,
- The mother has an infection of the placental tissues and amniotic fluid ,
- The mother has a urinary tract infection during the pregnancy,
- The mother's temperature is greater than 100.4 F (38 C) during labor,
- The mother previously delivered an infant with group B strep disease.

Adults at increased risk of a group B strep infection include:

- Persons with a medical condition that weakens their immune system, such as diabetes, HIV infection, cancer or liver disease,
- Persons older than 65 years of age.

What type of health problems are caused by group B strep?

Group B strep infection can lead to life-threatening problems in infants, including:

- Pneumonia
- Inflammation of the membranes and fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis)
- Infection in the bloodstream (bacteremia).

If you're pregnant, group B strep can cause infection in the following areas:

- Urinary tract
- Placenta and amniotic fluid
- Membrane lining the uterus
- Bloodstream.

If you're an older adult or you have a serious health condition, group B strep bacteria can cause complications such as:

- Skin infection
- Infection of the bloodstream
- Urinary tract infection
- Pneumonia
- Bone and joint infections
- Infection of the heart valves (endocarditis)
- Inflammation of the membranes and fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis).

How is group B strep diagnosed?

Group B strep is diagnosed through taking samples of body fluids (blood, spinal fluid) and sending them to a laboratory for a culture.

How is group B strep treated?

Healthcare providers usually treat group B strep disease with an antibiotic. Sometimes people with soft tissue and bone infections may need additional treatment, such as surgery. Treatment will depend on the type of infection caused by group B strep bacteria.

How can group B strep disease be prevented?

The two best ways to prevent group B strep disease during the first week of a newborn's life are:

- Testing pregnant women for group B strep bacteria when they are 36 through 37 weeks pregnant, and
- Giving antibiotics, during labor, to women at increased risk.

Unfortunately, experts have not identified effective ways to prevent group B strep disease in people older than one week old.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Mayo Clinic

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