

GROUP B STREP WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

1. What is group B strep?

Group B strep (streptococcus) is a type of bacteria that can cause serious illness and death in newborns. Until recent prevention efforts hundreds of babies died from group B strep every year. This type of bacteria can also cause illness in adults, especially the elderly, but it is most common in newborns.

2. Why do I need to get tested for group B strep during each pregnancy?

Group B strep bacteria can be passed from a mom who is a carrier for the bacteria (tests positive) to her baby during labor. Since the bacteria can come and go in your body, you need to be tested for group B strep every time you are pregnant, whether you tested negative or positive during the last pregnancy.

Toward the end of pregnancy (35-37 weeks), the doctor will swab your vagina and rectum. This is sent to a lab, where they test for group B strep bacteria. The bacteria take a few days to grow, and the results are sent to your doctor

3. What happens to babies born with the group B strep bacteria?

Group B strep is the most common cause of sepsis (blood infection) and meningitis (infection of the fluid and lining around the brain) in newborns. Most newborn disease happens within the first week of life, called “early onset” disease. In the year 2001, there were 1,700 early-onset cases in the U.S.

4. How can group B strep disease in babies be prevented?

Most early onset group B strep disease in newborns can be prevented by giving antibiotics (medicine) through the vein (IV) during labor to women who tested positive during their pregnancy. Because the bacteria can grow quickly, giving antibiotics before labor has started does not prevent the problem. Any woman who has a positive test for group B strep during this pregnancy should get antibiotics. Also, any pregnant woman who has had a baby in the past with group B strep disease, or who now has a bladder (urinary tract) infection caused by group B strep should get antibiotics during labor.

5. What if I’m allergic to some antibiotics?

Women who are allergic to some antibiotics, such as penicillin, can still get other types of antibiotics. If you think you are allergic to penicillin, talk with your doctor.

6. How does someone get group B strep?

Anyone can be a “carrier” for group B strep. The bacteria are found in the gastrointestinal tract (guts) and may move into the vagina and/or rectum. It is not a sexually transmitted disease (STD). About 1 in 4 women carry these bacteria. Most women would never have symptoms or know that they had these bacteria without a test during pregnancy.

7. If I know that I’m a group B strep carrier, why can’t I just take some antibiotics now?

For women who are group B strep carriers, antibiotics before labor are not a good way to get rid of group B strep. Because they naturally live in the gastrointestinal tract (guts), the bacteria often come back after antibiotic treatment. Antibiotics during labor are effective at protecting your baby because they greatly reduce the amount of bacteria the baby is exposed to during labor. Even if you had IV antibiotics for your last baby, you may not need them for this pregnancy if you are not a carrier now. That’s why it’s important to get tested during every pregnancy.

8. What do I need to do during pregnancy of labor if I’m group B strep positive?

Talk with your doctor and create a labor plan that includes getting antibiotics for group B strep prevention in your newborn. When your water breaks, or when you go into labor, make sure to get to the hospital at least four hours before delivery to make sure there is enough time for the antibiotics to work. When you get to the hospital, remind the staff that you are group B strep positive.

For more information, go to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov/groupbstrep , or ask your doctor.