

Group B Streptococcus GBS

What is GBS?

Group B streptococcus (GBS) is a type of bacteria that is commonly found in many healthy adults. GBS is not the same species of bacteria as group A streptococcus, which causes strep throat.

People with GBS often carry the bacteria but don't feel sick or have any symptoms. For healthy adults, GBS is usually harmless. However, a pregnant woman who carries GBS can pass it to her baby during labor and delivery, which can put her baby at risk of developing life-threatening infections. Fortunately, with proper screening and treatment, a mother who carries GBS can greatly reduce her baby's risk of illness.

What are the symptoms of GBS disease in a newborn?

Babies who are infected with GBS may develop either early-onset or late-onset GBS disease. Early-onset GBS disease occurs during the first week of life, usually within hours of birth. Late-onset GBS disease can develop up to several months after birth. About half of all late-onset GBS disease cases are the result of contracting GBS from the mother, while the source for the other late-onset GBS disease cases is often unknown.

Symptoms of GBS disease include:

- Fever
- Difficulty feeding
- Breathing problems
- Difficulty waking
- Limpness
- Irritability

These symptoms are also typical of many other illnesses in newborns. If you think your baby is sick, contact a healthcare professional immediately.

What are the possible complications of GBS disease?

If a baby develops GBS disease, the complications can be life-threatening and may include:

- Sepsis, a condition that occurs when infection travels through the bloodstream
- Pneumonia, an infection that occurs in the lungs
- Meningitis, an infection of the fluid and linings around the brain and spinal cord

Even with treatment, the complications of GBS disease can still be fatal. Babies who survive may experience long-term medical problems, including hearing or vision loss and seizures.

How can I help protect my baby from GBS?

Fortunately, most cases of GBS disease in newborns can be prevented. When you are 35–37 weeks pregnant—in your ninth month—talk to your healthcare professional about the GBS test. For this painless test, your healthcare professional will use a swab to collect samples from your vagina and rectum. The results of the test determine whether you are a GBS carrier.

If you are a GBS carrier, you should receive antibiotics through an IV (in the vein) when your water breaks or during labor. Antibiotics can help prevent the passing of GBS from you to your baby. You should also receive IV antibiotics during labor if you've already had a baby who developed GBS disease or if you've had a urinary tract infection caused by GBS during your current pregnancy. Taking antibiotics before you go into labor will not prevent the transmission of GBS because the bacteria can grow too quickly.

What should I do if my test shows I am a GBS carrier?

- Talk to your healthcare professional about a plan for labor.
- Let your healthcare professional know

whether you are allergic to any antibiotics.

- Go to the hospital when your water breaks or when your labor begins—antibiotics work best if you receive them 4 hours before your baby's birth.
- Tell your labor and delivery team that you are a GBS carrier.
- Expect to receive IV antibiotics.

What should I do if I go into labor before being tested for GBS?

If your water breaks or you go into labor before you've had a GBS test, tell your labor and delivery team that you haven't been tested for GBS. Let them know whether you are allergic to any antibiotics. Regardless of your GBS status, expect to receive IV antibiotics if:

- You have preterm labor (before 37 weeks)
- Your water breaks more than 18 hours before you go into labor
- You have a fever during labor

Where can I get more information about GBS?

Talk to your healthcare professional about protecting your baby from GBS and other health conditions.

Healthcare Professional's Instructions:

The information contained in this tear pad is not intended to replace the advice of a healthcare professional.