



Group B Strep in Pregnancy

What is group B strep (GBS)?

GBS is one of many common bacteria that normally live in the human body. GBS does not cause problems in healthy people. GBS is found in the intestine (gut), vagina, and rectum (bottom). About 2 in every 10 pregnant women have GBS in their normal bacteria. Some women have GBS in their vagina all the time. In others, GBS is in the vagina for a while then goes away and comes back later. GBS is not a sexually transmitted infection.

When can GBS cause infection?

GBS can cause pneumonia or a blood infection in newborn babies. This happens when the baby passes through the vagina during birth. Full-term babies whose mothers have GBS in their vagina have a 1 in 200 chance of getting sick from GBS during the first few days after birth. Women who have GBS in their vagina can also get an infection in their uterus during labor or after birth.

How do I know if I have GBS?

Some women find out they have GBS in their vagina when they have a urine culture. A culture is one kind of test that finds bacteria. A urine culture is recommended early in pregnancy to make sure there are no bacteria in your urine. If GBS is found in your urine, you also have GBS in your vagina. If GBS is not seen in your urine, a different test to see if you have GBS in your vagina will be offered later in pregnancy.

What test is done to see if I have GBS in my vagina?

When you are 36 to 38 weeks pregnant, you or your health care provider will collect a sample to test for GBS. This is done by touching the outer part of your vagina and just inside your anus with a sterile cotton swab (Q-tip). If GBS is in that sample, you will be told that you have GBS in your vagina. The test result will be put in your medical record. You can write your GBS test result on the next page of this handout.

How can newborn infection from GBS be prevented?

If you have GBS in a urine culture during pregnancy or GBS in a vaginal-rectal culture that was done within 5 weeks of giving birth, your health care provider will recommend that you get an antibiotic during labor. Getting at least 4 hours of an antibiotic that works against GBS will remove GBS from your vagina. If you have GBS in your vagina during labor and are given an IV antibiotic, the risk of your baby getting sick is very rare (about 1 in 4,000).

Do I have to wait for labor to take an antibiotic for GBS?

GBS is easily removed in the vagina and urine if you take an antibiotic. It is not easy to get rid of GBS in your intestine because antibiotics do not work well in that part of the body. If you take the antibiotic before you are in labor, GBS that lives in the intestine goes back to the vagina as soon as you stop taking the antibiotic. Taking an antibiotic for GBS before you are in labor can be unhealthy for you and your baby. It is best to take the antibiotic only during labor. This will get rid of the GBS in your vagina quickly at the only time that you need it to be gone.

What if I give birth before I get 4 hours of antibiotic?

The antibiotics that get rid of GBS work by being in your body for a period of time. The antibiotic starts working right away, but 4 hours of antibiotic is the best for getting rid of all the GBS in your vagina. Even a short time of getting an antibiotic in labor lowers the amount of GBS in your vagina and lowers the risk of your baby getting sick.



What if I am allergic to penicillin?

Penicillin is the antibiotic recommended for most women for getting rid of GBS. Many women who have been told they are allergic to penicillin can take it without any problem. An allergy to penicillin often goes away after several years. Also, many people were told they were allergic because they got a rash during a childhood sickness. Most of those rashes were not caused by penicillin. If you had severe breathing problems, a very itchy raised rash, or had to go to the hospital after taking penicillin, then you have a real penicillin allergy. If you are not sure if you have a real penicillin allergy, you may have a skin test for this during pregnancy. If you have a real penicillin allergy, a different antibiotic can be used to prevent GBS.

GROUP B STREP CULTURE RESULTS

Name

Date of Birth

Due Date

Date GBS culture obtained

Group B Strep NEGATIVE

Group B Strep POSITIVE

Penicillin Allergy: High Risk

Penicillin Allergy: Low Risk

For More Information

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

<https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Group-B-Strep-and-Pregnancy>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/groupbstrep/index.html>

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