

MANAGEMENT OF GROUP B STREPTOCOCCUS IN PREGNANCY

Group B Streptococcus (also called “Strep B”) is a bacterium that lives normally in the bodies of 10-30% of all men and women. As it usually doesn't cause any health problems, people who carry this organism are not considered “infected” but are considered to be “colonized” and don't require any treatment.

In pregnancy, however, if Strep B grows in the vagina or the rectum of the pregnant woman the baby may be exposed to the bacterium, and the baby can develop a very serious infection.

To identify women who are colonized with Strep B a swab is taken from the vagina and rectum in the last part of the pregnancy (between 34 and 37 weeks – after 8 months). The swab is then cultured to see if Strep B is present. A doctor, nurse, a midwife, or the pregnant woman herself takes the swab. The swab is taken without using any instruments, all it requires is the insertion of a sterile cotton swab into the lower part of the vagina and the rectum. The swab is then placed into a culture tube and sent to the laboratory. The result – positive or negative – is usually available within 2 days.

If the result is positive then the pregnant woman will be prescribed antibiotics that will protect the baby. Treatment with antibiotics before labor does not help, as the bacterium will grow back within a short period of time. Therefore, pregnant women who have a positive swab culture will be started on intravenous antibiotics when their membranes rupture or when they go into labor, and the antibiotics will be continued until after the baby is delivered. The antibiotics will be passed to the baby during labor and this will protect the baby from the bacterium.

As well as women who have a positive swab culture, the following also mean that a woman requires antibiotic treatment to protect her baby:

- 🔗 A previous baby affected by a Strep B infection
- 🔗 A positive Strep B urine culture during pregnancy (always requires antibiotic treatment)
- 🔗 Labor before 37 weeks
- 🔗 Ruptured membranes for longer than 18 hours
- 🔗 Fever during labor

It is very important to identify all pregnant women who are positive for Strep B so that they can be properly treated and their babies protected.

Terminology

Infection: An infection occurs when your body is invaded by bacteria or viruses (microorganisms) that have the potential to cause disease. Your body reacts to these microorganisms in an attempt to destroy them. The combination of the microorganisms and your body's attempts to destroy them is what makes you ill, and the resulting illness may need to be treated by a doctor. Some infections, like the common cold, can be passed from one person to another.

Colonization: Some bacteria and viruses live in your body without making you ill. Sometimes this is because the microorganism is harmless, sometimes it is because your body is immune to the illness normally caused by the microorganism. When this happens you are considered to be "colonized", which means that the microorganisms are in your body but you do not have any symptoms, you are not ill, and you do not need to be treated by a doctor. Even though you are not ill, sometimes you can pass the microorganisms on to other people and they will become ill.

Culture: This is when microorganisms are grown in the laboratory. A swab is taken from the part of your body that has been infected or colonized by the microorganism and the swab is sent to the laboratory. The laboratory will grow a culture from the microorganisms on the swab. A culture is grown so that the microorganism can be properly identified. If the microorganism is making you ill, the culture will also help the doctors to decide what treatment they should give you.

If you have any questions, talk to your doctor at the clinic.