

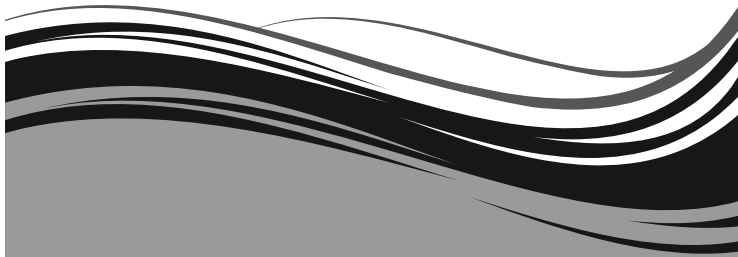
**West of Scotland  
Managed Clinical  
Network**



**NHS**  
Greater Glasgow  
and Clyde

Information about

# Early Onset Neonatal Infection



Bacterial infections that happen within 72 hours of birth are uncommon but they can be extremely dangerous for newborn babies. The medical name for this is **'early-onset neonatal bacterial infection'**. These infections can be very serious if there is a delay in recognising that a baby is ill and starting treatment.

This leaflet explains how we recognise infection in newborn babies and how we treat it.

If you have any further questions or concerns after reading this leaflet please speak to the member of staff in charge of your baby's care.

## Risk factors for infection

Your baby might be at a higher risk of infection if:

- Your baby is born before 37 weeks gestation
- Your waters break early
- The bacteria 'Group B streptococcus' is detected during your pregnancy
- You have had a baby before who had an infection with 'Group B streptococcus'
- You have signs of infection during labour and need treatment with antibiotics
- You have had a multiple birth in which one baby has suspected or confirmed infection

If your baby has a risk factor for infection, the staff will monitor them for at least 24 hours to look for signs of infection. This means that you and your baby will need to stay in hospital for at least 24 hours after delivery.

We may start your baby on antibiotics if they have more than one risk factor for infection, or if they are showing signs of infection.

## Signs of infection

Signs of infection in babies can include:

- Breathing fast
- Having a high or low temperature
- Being very sleepy or very irritable
- Having difficulty feeding
- Vomiting
- Floppiness
- Jaundice in the first 24 hours of life

If you think that your baby might be unwell please let your midwife know.

## What happens my baby is showing signs of infection?

If your baby is showing signs of infection, a member of the neonatal team will review them and then decide if your baby needs antibiotics.

If we do not give your baby antibiotics we may monitor them for 24 hours. The midwives will regularly check their breathing, heart rate and temperature. Most babies with early onset neonatal infection become unwell in the first 24 hours of their life.

## If your baby needs antibiotics

If your baby needs antibiotics to treat an infection, this will be through a drip. We will insert a small plastic tube called a cannula into their vein, usually in their hand, and take blood tests to look for signs of infection.

Your baby will stay on antibiotic treatment until we know the results of the blood tests and after monitoring has shown that your baby is well.

Sometimes babies need more tests such as a chest X-ray to look for pneumonia or a lumbar puncture to check for meningitis. We will explain these tests to you in more detail if your baby needs them.

## Are there any other options for treatment?

Some babies need only monitoring (observation), some need blood tests and antibiotic treatment.

We will plan your baby's care in partnership with you and the neonatal team will always be happy to discuss any concerns that you may have.

## Going home

Once you go home with your baby the chance of them having an infection is very low.

Signs that your baby might be unwell include:

- Your baby is showing unusual behaviour, for example is very sleepy or very irritable or has inconsolable crying
- Your baby is very floppy
- Your baby has a temperature lower than 36°C or higher than 38°C
- Your baby is breathing very fast, having difficulty breathing or is grunting
- Your baby's skin is very pale, blue or grey or dark yellow

- Your baby has new difficulties with feeding or is vomiting a dark green liquid

**If you notice any of these signs or have any other concerns you should get urgent medical help from your midwife, your GP or NHS 24 on 111.**

**If you are worried that your baby is very unwell, particularly if they are having difficulties with their breathing or are very sleepy or floppy, you can call for an emergency ambulance by dialling 999.**



## Further information

The [NHS website](#) has more information about neonatal infection:

<https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/infections-that-may-affect-your-baby/>

The organisations below can give you more advice and support:

[Bliss](#) [www.bliss.org.uk](http://www.bliss.org.uk) 0500 618140

[Group B Strep Support](#) [www.gbss.org.uk](http://www.gbss.org.uk)  
01444 416176

[National Childbirth Trust \(NCT\)](#)  
[www.nct.org.uk](http://www.nct.org.uk) 0300 330 0700

[National Breastfeeding Network](#)  
[www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk) 0300 100  
0212 (operated with the Association of  
Breastfeeding Mothers)

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