

Maternity

Guidance for parents about Vitamin K

What is Vitamin K?

Vitamin K is an important vitamin for newborn babies. It helps the blood to clot and prevents serious bleeding. Normally, we get Vitamin K from the food that we eat, but babies are born with very low levels

Why is Vitamin K recommended?

Babies are at risk of Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB). This can cause severe bleeding in the brain or gut, which can lead to permanent damage or even death.

About 1 in 10,000 babies may develop VKDB but giving Vitamin K almost completely prevents it. Vitamin K also supports healthy bone growth.

Who needs Vitamin K?

The Department of Health recommends that all newborn babies get Vitamin K to protect them from this rare but serious condition.

All babies are at risk, but some have a higher risk of VKDB if:

- They have liver disease or bleeding problems
- Their mother takes certain anti-seizure medicines during pregnancy
- They were born using forceps, vacuum delivery or had bruising at birth
- They have a condition that makes it hard to absorb vitamins
- They were born before 37 weeks



Patient Information

Important: Oral Vitamin K is not suitable for sick or premature babies. If your baby is in the neonatal unit, the baby doctor or neonatal nurse practitioner will discuss the dose and method with you, as the amount of Vitamin K may be different.

Even babies without any of these risks can develop VKDB. Around 30 out of every 100 babies who get it do not have these risk factors.

How is Vitamin K given?

Research shows that an injection is the most effective way to prevent VKDB. Parents can choose between an injection or drops by mouth. Most parents choose the injection.

Injection

- Given once in the baby's leg shortly after birth.
- It works fast, lasts for months and does not need repeating.
- It is usually not painful, but some babies may have mild discomfort, swelling or redness where the injection is given.

By mouth (oral drops)

- Given as drops into the baby's mouth shortly after birth, with a second dose between days 4 and 7.
- Bottle-fed babies only need 2 doses, as formula milk already has Vitamin K.
- Breast-fed babies need a third dose at one month to stay protected.
- Oral Vitamin K may be slightly less effective, as some babies may not absorb it well. You will be sent home with the second dose, and the third dose is given by your GP or health visitor.

Patient Information

Parental choice

All parents have the right to decide whether their baby receives Vitamin K. We strongly recommend that all babies have Vitamin K. If you do not want your baby to have it, please talk to the midwife caring for you. You may be asked to read some additional information or sign a form to confirm your choice.

For more information

If you have any questions, contact your GP, antenatal clinic, community midwives, or health visitor. You can find their phone numbers in your Patient Handheld Records.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact the antenatal clinic on 024 7696 7350 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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