

Women's and Children's Department

Babies at risk of infection – information for parents

Congratulations on the birth of your baby. We are giving you this leaflet because your baby may have an infection or be at risk of developing an infection.

Your baby will have blood tests to check for signs of infection and will be given antibiotics whilst we wait for the blood test results. Twice a day, your baby will visit the neonatal unit to be given their antibiotics. These must be given through a drip because newborn babies do not absorb medicines very well when given by mouth.

Your baby will usually stay with mum on the postnatal ward and will be regularly observed.

Most babies recover fully from infection when treated with antibiotics. However, some babies can become very unwell. This is why we treat possible infection seriously.

What is neonatal sepsis?

Neonatal sepsis is an infection which can affect any part of the body. Newborn babies are at risk of infection as they have an immature (not fully developed) immune system.



Why does my baby need antibiotics?

The neonatal doctor or an advanced neonatal nurse practitioner (ANNP) will check your baby. If there are any concerns that your baby is at risk of infection, antibiotics will be prescribed and reasons for the antibiotics explained to you.

Some of the risks for neonatal infection are:

- Group B Streptococcus (GBS) infection found in mum, during this pregnancy and not effectively treated in labour.
- If an older child was unwell with GBS infection after birth.
- If the waters broke more than 24 hours before the baby was born, or more than 18 hours if the baby is premature.
- If the baby is premature (born at less than 37 completed weeks of pregnancy).
- If mum has been unwell and started on antibiotics within 24 hours before delivery or up to 24 hours after the baby was born.
- If the baby showed signs of being in distress during labour or needed extra help to adapt after being born.
- If the baby's twin or triplet needs antibiotics.

Some babies are given antibiotics because they are already showing signs that they might have an infection. These signs may be:

- Breathing difficulties.
- Unstable temperature (too hot and/or too cold).
- Needing treatment for jaundice in the first day of life.
- Behaving unusually, either very unsettled, very quiet, or not feeding properly.

What tests will be done and when will I find out the results?

When a baby needs antibiotics, they are assessed by a member of the neonatal team who will place a small flexible tube – a cannula - into the baby's vein. During this procedure three blood samples will be taken: a blood culture, a full blood count and a C-reactive protein (CRP).

Patient Information

- Blood culture tell us if there are any germs in the baby's blood stream and this test usually takes 36 - 48 hours before the results are ready.
- Full blood count will show if the baby has raised white blood cells which occur if there is an infection present.
- CRP is a marker for infection in the blood; if it becomes high this will show that your baby's body is reacting to an infection. The CRP will be repeated from a heel prick at around 18 - 24 hours after the first test as it sometimes takes a little longer for the baby to react to an infection.
- Full blood count and CRP results will usually be available in a few hours.

How will my baby be monitored?

Every day, a member of the neonatal team will check your baby's progress, tell you the test results and answer any questions that you may have.

Your baby will have their heart rate, breathing, temperature and oxygen levels regularly checked by the staff on the postnatal ward. Any abnormal observations are reported to the neonatal team.

If you are worried about your baby at any time, please let a midwife know.

When will we be able to go home?

If the blood culture is negative at 36 - 48 hours from testing, all the other blood tests are normal and your baby is well, we will stop the antibiotics and remove the cannula (tube).

If any of the blood tests are not normal or your baby appears to be unwell, they will need a longer course of antibiotics and may need more tests. These babies usually need around five days of antibiotics, but this might be longer, depending on what the problem is.

Patient Information

Where can I find more information?

National guidance regarding neonatal infection can be found on the NICE website at: www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg149/informationforpublic

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 7315 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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To give feedback on this leaflet please email feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk

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