

# Vitamin K for Newborn Babies

## What is Vitamin K?

Vitamin K is a naturally occurring vitamin found in small amounts in green, leafy vegetables. It is also produced by bacteria in the bowel.

Vitamin K is an essential part of the body's blood clotting process. If there isn't enough Vitamin K, bleeding can occur without an injury.

## Why do we recommend it for babies?

Babies are born with a lower level of Vitamin K than adults but the amount is usually enough to stop bleeding. A condition called Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB) occurs in approximately 1 in 10,000 babies. The problem is not always obvious at birth and may not become so until the baby is a week old, often with serious consequences to a baby's well-being. About half of affected babies do not start bleeding until after the first week. They will often bleed into the brain leading to brain damage. There is Vitamin K in breast milk but not a sufficient quantity to prevent VKDB in susceptible babies.

Some babies are thought to be at higher risk of developing the disorder. This includes babies:

- born before 37 weeks
- who have had a complicated birth
- known to have liver disease
- whose mothers have been on certain medication eg drugs for epilepsy.

However, a lot of babies born with VKDB have no risk factors.

Consequently the Department of Health (DOH) and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommend all newborn babies receive Vitamin K within 24 hours of birth.

## Can Vitamin K be harmful?

In the early 1990s a small research study suggested a link between Vitamin K supplements and leukaemia. Following this there was an in depth study comparing the number of children with leukaemia who had had the supplement and who had not. No link was found.

As with any injection, it will cause some pain to the baby when it is given and some bruising may occur where the injection is put in the baby.

## How do we give Vitamin K?

NICE recommend that Vitamin K is given as a single injection, normally into the baby's thigh soon after birth.

Alternatively Vitamin K can be given into the baby's mouth. Vitamin K can be given by mouth and repeated at one week of age and again at four weeks to those babies who are receiving more than half their feeds from breast milk. Vitamin K is added to formula milk so babies do not require a third dose if receiving mainly formula milk.

Given orally or by injection the Vitamin K provided in this medication is Bovine derived (cow liver products) and there is no alternative.

You will be asked after the birth if you want your baby to have Vitamin K and how you would like it to be given. If you have any questions not answered in this leaflet please ask your midwife.

## References

Department of Health (1998) Vitamin K for Newborn Babies. Available at: [www.doh.gov.uk](http://www.doh.gov.uk)

National Childbirth Trust (2008) Info Centre—Vitamin K

Available at: [www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/decisions/view-35](http://www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/decisions/view-35)

National Institute for Clinical Excellence (2006) NICE clinical guideline 37—postnatal care.

Available at: [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

## How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection prevention and control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection prevention and control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming into and after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser as hand sanitisers are not suitable for use when dealing with patients who have symptoms of diarrhoea.

### Approvals:

*Maternity Guidelines Group: Oct 2010 V2 Sep 2011, V3 no changes, V4 Feb 2020*

*Divisional Board: Dec 2010, V2 Jun 2012, V4 Apr 2020*

*Clinical Guidelines Subgroup: Dec 2010, V3 Jun 2014 & Jun 2017, V4 May 2020*

*MSLC: V2 May 2012, V4 Apr 2020*

*Equality Impact Assessment: Nov 2011, V4 Feb 2020*

*Patient Experience Group: V2 Jun 2012, V4 Jul 2020*

## Division of Women, Children & Sexual Health Services