

Vitamin K

What Is Vitamin K and Why Do Babies Need It?

Vitamin K is a substance that is naturally present in the body. It plays an important part in helping blood to clot. At birth a baby has very low stores of vitamin K and requires additional doses to prevent a serious bleeding condition 'vitamin K deficiency bleeding' (VKDB).

After your baby is born, a midwife will ask for your permission to give vitamin K to your baby.

VKDB causes excessive bleeding and about half of the babies affected bleed into their brain and these babies either die or survive with disability.

In babies who don't get vitamin K at birth, about 4 to 10 babies in 100,000 get VKDB. Babies at increased risk include preterm infants, babies with liver disease and babies of mothers receiving drugs such as Warfarin, Rifampicin, or anticonvulsants, but most babies affected don't have any of these risk factors. If we didn't give vitamin K, we would expect to see one baby from Liverpool Women's Hospital every year or two with VKDB.

When Is Vitamin K Given?

In this hospital we recommend that all babies are given vitamin K shortly after birth.

How Is Vitamin K Given?

Vitamin K can either be given by mouth or as an injection. If your baby is sick, premature or not feeding properly, we will give the vitamin K as an injection. If you have liver disease, or if you are on certain medications (such as Warfarin, Rifampicin, or any anticonvulsant), we will also give it as an injection. Otherwise, you can choose which type of treatment your baby has.

Which Is the Best Way to Give Vitamin K?

The injection will be uncomfortable for your baby, but only as much as any other injection, like the childhood vaccinations we recommend. One injection shortly after birth provides complete protection against VKDB. If vitamin K is given by mouth, several doses are needed as the absorption is unreliable. The first dose is given on the day of birth and a second dose is given when the baby is 7 days old. For breast fed babies, a further dose is given when the baby is 28 days old. Bottle-fed babies don't need this third dose, because

vitamin K is already added in small amounts to formula milks. Although giving vitamin K by mouth gives a lot of protection against VKDB, it does not give complete protection and there is still a risk of dangerous bleeding in some babies.

What Do We Recommend?

We recommend that all babies born at Liverpool Women's NHS Foundation Trust should receive vitamin K on the first day of life as an injection. We believe this is the safest and most effective way to protect your baby. We think that the extra protection that an injection gives is worth the discomfort of an injection.

If you have any questions about vitamin K, please ask to speak to the Midwife or Paediatrician looking after you and your baby or telephone the Neonatal Unit on 0151 702 4093.

What If I Choose For My Baby Not To Have Vitamin K?

If you choose not to give your baby vitamin K, it is important to recognise the warning signs of VKDB and obtain early treatment to reduce the severity of the disorder should it occur. These include:

- Spontaneous bruising
- Bleeding (from the nose, umbilicus)
- Prolonged jaundice (after 2 weeks of age)
- Pale stools and/or dark urine

Please ask your midwife or medical team if you have any further questions.

This leaflet can be made available in different formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk

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