

# GROUP B STREPTOCOCCUS AND PREGNANCY

## Patient Information Sheet

### What is group B streptococcus?

Group B streptococcus (group B strep) is a common bacterium that is found in the body. It is usually harmless in adults. Ten percent to 30% of pregnant women carry the bacterium in their vagina. Sometimes, a woman who has group B strep can infect her baby during delivery. This can occasionally cause serious illness in the newborn. The mother may also become very ill from the infection after the delivery.

### Facts about group B streptococcus

Even if you have group B strep, your baby will not necessarily be infected or develop serious illness. Here are a few other facts about group B strep:

- Group B strep is not a sexually transmitted infection (STI).
- Group B strep is not the same as other types of *streptococci* bacteria, such as those that cause strep throat.
- Often, group B strep causes no symptoms or problems in adults.
- A mother who has group B strep can infect her newborn.
- Group B strep may become a problem if you also have other risk factors during pregnancy.
- When a mother with certain risk factors (see below) is treated for group B strep during delivery, the risk of her baby being infected or becoming seriously ill is much reduced.

### What can increase the risk?

Certain risk factors during pregnancy can increase your chances of passing group B strep to your newborn. Here are some of those risk factors:

- A urinary tract infection with group B strep.
- Breaking or leaking of the amniotic sac (the bag of fluid that holds the baby) earlier than 37 weeks.
- Labour earlier than 37 weeks.

- Breaking of the amniotic sac more than 18 hours before labour begins.
- Fever during labour.
- You have had another baby born with a group B strep infection.

### Treatment for group B streptococcus

If your doctor or obstetrician thinks your baby is at risk of group B strep infection, you will be given an antibiotic to help stop the infection. The antibiotic is given through an intravenous line during labour and delivery.

### If your baby becomes infected

If group B strep infects your baby, symptoms may take 2 days or more to appear. The baby may have infection in the blood, lungs, brain or spinal cord, which will need medical treatment.

### Group B strep testing

A routine group B strep test is done commonly in Australian hospitals. It is usually done between 35 and 37 weeks of pregnancy. Your doctor or obstetrician will use sterile swabs to take samples from your vagina and rectum. You may collect your own swabs following instruction from your health care provider. The test is simple and does not hurt. The samples are then sent to a laboratory. The results show whether you have group B strep bacteria in your genital area. These test results cannot say whether or not your baby will become infected with group B strep. They can, however, help your doctor or obstetrician decide whether antibiotic treatment to prevent infection is needed.

### Your pregnancy

If you carry group B strep there is a risk of your baby becoming infected during delivery, especially if other risk factors occur. However, you can be treated during labour and delivery. Ask your doctor or obstetrician any questions you have about group B strep.