

Group B Streptococcus (GBS) Infection during Pregnancy

What is Group B Streptococcus (GBS)?

This is a group of germs, called bacteria, commonly found in a woman's bladder, kidneys and/or uterus. It is not the same germ that causes strep throat.

Some women have GBS and do not know it. They do not have any symptoms.

Some women have GBS and get an infection in the bladder, kidneys and/or uterus. Infection causes inflammation (redness), swelling and pain inside the body.

What is the risk of having GBS during pregnancy?

If a woman has GBS the baby can catch it during delivery during the birth process. Although this is rare, a baby can get very sick and may die if he or she gets an infection.

You are at risk of passing GBS to your baby if:

- you start labour before 37 weeks gestation – with or without ruptured membranes (water breaks)
- reach full term and the membrane has ruptured (water breaks) and it looks like the labour will last more than 18 hours
- you have a mild fever during labour for no clear reason
- you have had a baby with GBS in the past
- you have a GBS infection now or have had one in the past in your bladder or kidney

How is a GBS test done?

In order to keep you and your baby safe, your doctor will decide if you should be screened for GBS. All women are screened for GBS before 35 weeks gestation. A special cotton-tip swab is inserted into your vagina and then your rectum. The swab is put into a special solution to see if it grows the bacteria. You may be asked to do the test yourself in the bathroom at the doctor's, midwife's or health care provider's office.

How is GBS treated?

If you have GBS during pregnancy you will be treated with antibiotic medication:

- if your membranes rupture (water breaks)
- during labour

If you have not been tested for GBS and your doctor or midwife thinks you and your baby are at risk for GBS, you will take antibiotic medication during labour. This medication is given through a thin tube into a vein in your arm. This is called an intravenous or IV.

Antibiotic medication is not given during pregnancy because research has shown that most of the time, the bacteria comes back before labour begins.

What happens after labour?

After the birth of your baby, the IV antibiotic medication is stopped.

Your baby is watched for signs of an infection. Your baby will be given antibiotic medication if needed and taken care of by members of the health care team.