

## Life-threatening infections for newborns

Written by New Mexico Department of Health  
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When we think of strep throat, we generally think of that infection most of us get during a lifetime where we get this sudden, painful sore throat and fever. We just go to the doctor, get antibiotics, stay home from work or school a day or two and everything's fine.

Truth is, there are many different types of strep bacteria. Some cause more serious illness than others.

Strep throat is a bacterial infection in the throat and the tonsils. It's caused by streptococcal (strep) bacteria, and it can be passed from person-to-person when the infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes, tiny droplets with the strep bacteria go into the air. It's that simple: those itty bitty droplets can be breathed in by other people. If you come into contact with strep, it will take 2 to 5 days before you start to have symptoms.

One type of strep is called Group B Streptococcus. It makes people of all ages sick – but it's a very dangerous strep for newborns. You may have also heard of it called GBS or baby strep. Whichever name you use, group B strep in newborns can often lead to sepsis (infection of the blood), pneumonia (infection in the lungs), and sometimes meningitis (infection of the fluid and lining around the brain).

Here's the scary part: Strep B is as common as it is dangerous. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports Strep B is a very common bacteria found in one out of four healthy pregnant woman. Any woman can get the bacteria and possibly infect her baby.

Being a carrier for these bacteria does not mean you have an infection. It only means that you have group B strep bacteria in your body. These bacteria are usually not harmful to you -- only

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to your baby during labor.

So how do you protect your newborn from Strep B? The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) and the CDC recommends that mothers-to-be ask their doctor for a GBS test when you are 35 to 37 weeks pregnant (in your 9th month). Each time you are pregnant, you need to be tested for GBS. It doesn't matter if you did or did not have this type of bacteria before -- each pregnancy is different.

The medicine to stop GBS from spreading to your baby is an antibiotic given during labor. The antibiotic (usually penicillin) is given to you through an IV (in the vein) during childbirth. If you are allergic to penicillin, there are still other choices to help treat you during labor.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions. For more information you can also visit the CDC's webpage.