

# Vitamin K for newborn babies

## Information for parents and guardians

**When your baby is born, your midwife will offer you an injection of vitamin K for them. This helps to prevent a rare bleeding disorder.**

If you prefer your baby not to have an injection, they can have vitamin K by mouth instead, but they will need further doses.

This factsheet explains the reasons for offering vitamin K.

### **What is vitamin K?**

Vitamin K is a vitamin that occurs naturally in many foods.

### **What does vitamin K do?**

We all need vitamin K for a number of our body's normal functions. One important function is helping to make blood clot in order to prevent bleeding.

### **Why do we offer vitamin K?**

When your baby is first born and whilst being fed entirely on milk, he/she may have very little vitamin K.

A small number of babies suffer bleeding due to vitamin K deficiency. This is known as vitamin K deficiency bleeding or VKDB for short.

This is a rare disorder leading to bleeding from the nose, mouth, umbilical cord, intestines or brain.

The risk of bleeding in the first few days of life may be as high as 1 in 2000.

A small group of babies (1:10,000) may be at risk of bleeding later in the first year. Giving vitamin K can prevent this.

### **How can vitamin K be given?**

#### **By injection**

- An injection into the muscle of the baby's thigh following birth prevents VKDB in virtually all babies.
- The injection does not need to be repeated.
- This method is currently recommended by the Princess Anne Hospital.

#### **By mouth**

- This method can be just as good as having an injection but only if the dose is repeated.
- A dose is given at birth, and then a further dose is given in the first week of life (between four and seven days). It is then repeated at one month of age if baby is exclusively breastfed.

### **Can vitamin K be harmful?**

In the early 1990's there was some research published that suggested a possible link between vitamin K injections and childhood cancers, such as leukaemia.

Since then, multiple research studies of thousands of children have not identified any convincing evidence of a link between vitamin K administration and childhood cancers.

Currently the Department of Health recommends that vitamin K should be offered to all newborn babies because of its proven benefits in reducing the risk of vitamin K deficiency bleeding.

### **High risk babies**

Some babies are especially vulnerable to bleeding, made worse by a lack of vitamin K.

Because the risks of bleeding are high, and the consequences potentially serious, it is our policy to give vitamin K by injection to all such babies admitted to the neonatal unit as part of the admission procedure.

### **Further information**

If you would like further information or have any concerns you wish to discuss, please ask your midwife, GP or health visitor.

### **Useful links**

NHS UK

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/what-happens-straight-after-the-birth/#vitamin-k-for-newborn-babies](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/what-happens-straight-after-the-birth/#vitamin-k-for-newborn-babies)

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone **023 8120 4688** for help.

[www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrenshospital](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrenshospital)

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