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Group B strep disease

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Overview

Group B strep is a common type of bacteria. Another name for it is *Streptococcus agalactiae*. It's often carried in the intestines or lower genital tract.

It is usually harmless in healthy adults. But in newborns it can cause a serious illness known as group B strep disease.

Group B strep also can cause dangerous infections in adults with some long-term conditions, such as diabetes or liver disease. Older adults have a higher risk of illness from group B strep too.

If you're a healthy adult, there's nothing you need to do about group B strep.

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Symptoms

Infants

Most babies born to women carrying group B strep are healthy. But the few who are infected by group B strep during labor can become very ill. Some infections with this type of bacteria can be life-threatening.

In infants, illness caused by group B strep can start within six hours of birth. This is called early onset disease. Or the illness could start weeks or months after birth. This is called late onset disease.

Symptoms might include:

- Fever.
- Low body temperature.
- Trouble feeding.
- Sluggishness, limpness or weak muscle tone.
- ~~Trouble breathing~~

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- Jittery movements.
- Seizures.
- Rash.
- Jaundice.

Adults

Many adults carry group B strep in their bodies and have no symptoms. Most often, the bacteria is carried in the bowel, vagina, rectum, bladder or throat.

But sometimes, group B strep can cause a urinary tract infection or other more-serious infections. Symptoms of infections that may be caused by group B strep include the following:

Urinary tract infection

- A strong, persistent urge to urinate.
- A burning sensation or pain when urinating.
- Passing frequent, small amounts of urine.
- Urine that appears red, bright pink or cola colored — a sign of blood in the urine.
- Pelvic pain.

Blood infection from the bacteria, also called bacteremia

- Fever.
- Chills.
- Confusion or lack of alertness.

Pneumonia

- Fever.

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- Shortness of breath.
- Chest pain when you breathe or cough.

Skin or soft-tissue infection

- Swelling, warmth or a skin color change in the area of the infection.
- Pain in the area of the infection.
- Sores with pus or drainage.

Bone or joint infection

- Fever.
- Chills.
- Swelling, warmth or a change in skin color over the area of the infection.
- Pain in the area of the infection.
- Stiffness or no ability to use a limb or joint.

When to see a doctor

If you have symptoms of group B strep infection, call a member of your health care team right away. This is especially important if you have any of the following risk factors:

- You're pregnant.
- You have an ongoing medical condition.
- You're older than 65.

If you think your infant has symptoms of group B strep disease, call your baby's health care professional right away.

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Causes

Many healthy people carry group B strep bacteria in their bodies. You might carry the bacteria in your body for a short time. It can come and go. Or you might always have it. Group B strep bacteria are not spread through sex, food or water. It isn't clear how the bacteria are spread to anyone other than newborns.

Group B strep can spread to a baby during a vaginal delivery. This happens if the baby is exposed to — or swallows — fluids that contain the bacteria.

Risk factors

Infants

An infant born prematurely, meaning earlier than 37 weeks, has a higher risk of getting group B strep disease.

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