

INFORMATION SHEET

Streptococcus B during Pregnancy

expert care
for women

What is streptococcus B?

Streptococcus B is a common bacteria, which is found in 30% of pregnant women. There are no symptoms of having the bacteria and it can be present in your body one week and not the next.

How can streptococcus B affect my baby and me?

The bacteria will not affect you; you will not show any symptoms or have any discomfort. The bacteria will not affect your baby during the pregnancy; however, it can be passed onto your baby during the birth process. The risk of your baby being affected by the bacteria during labour is as low as one per cent. If the bacterium is passed onto your baby during the birth process, your baby may get a generalised infection in their eyes, ears or nose. In extreme cases the bacteria may cause the baby to have breathing difficulties, pneumonia and in incredibly rare cases, can cause death.

Can streptococcus B be treated?

Yes, streptococcus is treated with antibiotics. If you test positive to the bacteria at 36 weeks of pregnancy, you will be given antibiotics during your labour, or after your waters have broken.

How can you test for the bacteria?

It is common practice for women to be tested for the bacteria, at 36 weeks of pregnancy. The test is a simple low vaginal swab, collected from the opening of the vagina. The swab is then tested for the bacteria. If the test is positive you will be given antibiotics during labour or when your waters have broken.

If I tested positive, could I simply have the antibiotics immediately?

No, because the bacteria comes and goes so unpredictably. Even if you were treated with antibiotics at 36 weeks, the bacteria may come back a few weeks later and be present during your labour anyway. If you test positive to

the bacteria at 36 weeks, you may not have the bacteria when you give birth, but you will be given antibiotics as a precaution.

How are the antibiotics given?

When you begin labour, you will be given an injection of antibiotics. You may need to have several injections during the labour. To help ease any discomfort from the injections you will have a plastic cannula placed into a vein in your forearm. All injections can then be given through the cannula. The cannula will not restrict your movement during labour; you will still be able to use the bath or shower. If your waters break and you are not having contractions you may need to have some antibiotic tablets.

Will my baby need to be tested for the bacteria after birth?

If you have tested positive, your baby has a 30 - 70% chance of having the bacteria passed on during birth; however they only have a one percent chance of infection. Your baby will be checked for any signs of infection, during the first 48 hours after birth.