

Group B Streptococcus

Definition:

Group B strep (streptococcus) is a type of bacteria that can cause serious illness and death in newborns. It can also cause illness in pregnant women, the elderly and adults with other illnesses such as diabetes and liver disease.

Signs and symptoms:

Most cases of group B strep disease among newborns happen in the first week of life ("early-onset disease"), and most of these cases start a few hours after birth. Sepsis (infection of the blood), pneumonia (infection in the lungs), and meningitis (infection of the fluid and lining around the brain) are the most common problems. Group B strep disease may also develop in infants one week to several months after birth ("late -onset disease"). Meningitis is more common with late-onset group B strep disease.

Transmission:

Anyone can be a "carrier" for group B strep. The bacteria are found in the gastrointestinal tract and may move into the vagina and/or rectum. It is not a sexually transmitted disease. About 1 in 4 women carry the bacteria. Most women would never have symptoms or know that they had these bacteria without a test during pregnancy. Group B strep bacteria can be passed from a mom who is a carrier to her baby during labor.

Diagnosis in pregnancy:

National guidelines recommend that a pregnant woman be tested for group B strep in her vagina and rectum when she is 35 to 37 weeks pregnant. The test is simple and does not hurt. A sterile swab ("Q-tip") is used to collect a sample from the vagina and the rectum. This is sent to a laboratory for testing.

Diagnosis in babies:

If a mother received antibiotics for group B strep during labor, the baby will be observed to see if he or she should get extra testing or treatment. If the doctors suspect that a baby has group B strep infection, they will take a sample of the baby's sterile body fluids, such as blood or spinal fluid. Group B strep disease is diagnosed when the bacteria are grown from cultures of those fluids. Cultures take a few days to grow. Group B strep infections in both newborns and adults are usually treated with antibiotics.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- Provide information to pregnant students regarding a labor plan that includes getting tested and receiving antibiotics for group B strep prevention in their newborn.

Treatment Recommendations

- Pregnant women who are diagnosed with group B strep will be given antibiotics during labor.

Exclusions

- There is no need to exclude students from school for group B strep

Reporting Requirements

- Invasive group B streptococcus disease is reportable within 48 hours of diagnosis

Resources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevention of Perinatal Group B Streptococcal Disease. Revised Guidelines from CDC, 2010. MMWR 2010; 59 (No. RR-10).
- Fast Facts <http://www.cdc.gov/groupbstrep/about/fast-facts.html>