

Family Friendly Working

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- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Start Here](#)
- [Media](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Advertise](#)

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[Home](#) » [business mums news](#), [health](#)

This month is International Prenatal Infection Prevention Month #ipip

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If you are pregnant, or know someone who is, be aware of group B Strep. Group B Strep is the UK's most common cause of life-threatening infection in newborn babies and of meningitis in babies up to the age of 3 months. It is more common than spina bifida and as common as Down's syndrome, yet few pregnant women have heard of it.

Mum Kirsty Jeeves from Lincolnshire had neither heard of group B Strep infection, nor offered testing to detect group B Strep carriage during her pregnancy. Although her pregnancy was difficult, Kirsty had none of the recognised risk-factors for group B Strep infection in her baby when she went into labour.

Oliver was born in January 2014 and, within moments of being born, was transferred to intensive care – initially to combat a supposed 'lactic acid build-up.' After a day of tests, Mum and Dad were informed that Oliver had group B Strep septicaemia.

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"We had no idea what group B Strep was or how serious it could be, until we researched it. Our hearts sank when we realised how poorly our newborn son was. We sat by Oliver's bed praying for him to recover," says Mum Kirsty.

During his nine days in hospital, Oliver rallied and recovered. He is making good progress and is now a healthy, happy little boy.

Oliver's infection and the family's trauma could have been avoided had Mum Kirsty been informed about group B Strep, offered a test for group B Strep carriage late in pregnancy and then offered antibiotics during labour to protect Oliver from group B Strep infection.

Mum Kirsty says, "*Women need to be made aware of just how devastating group B Strep infection can be.*"

Is your baby at risk of group B Strep infection?

There are six key situations where a newborn baby is known to have a higher risk of developing group B Strep infection –

- Mum has had a previous baby infected with group B Strep
- Group B Strep found in Mum's urine during this pregnancy
- Mum has a raised temperature during labour (37.5°C or higher)
- Group B Strep found on a vaginal or rectal swab during this pregnancy
- Labour starts or waters break before 37 weeks of pregnancy
- Waters break more than 18 hours before delivery

How to protect your unborn baby from group B Strep:

- The best time to test for group B Strep is in the latter stages of pregnancy – between 35-37 weeks of pregnancy. REMEMBER to ask your midwife or health professional about group B Strep and to ask if they will test you for group B Strep.
- If not, contact one of a number of private laboratories that offer a home-testing pack for the test (see www.gbss.org.uk/test for which organisations offer the sensitive, ECM test both on the NHS and privately).
- If you have had a previous baby infected with group B Strep, you should be offered antibiotics (usually penicillin) from the start of labour and at intervals until your baby's birth.
- If group B Strep has been detected during your pregnancy, your health professionals should offer you antibiotics that help protect your baby during labour and birth from developing group B Strep infection. HOWEVER without a positive group B Strep test during the current pregnancy, you will not be offered intravenous antibiotics in labour unless one or more of the other risk-factors are present.

Jane Plumb MBE, chief executive of Group B Strep Support, the UK's dedicated charity to preventing life-threatening group B Strep infection in newborn babies says, "*There has been no fall in the rate of group B Strep infection in newborn babies since the current risk-based prevention strategy was introduced in 2003. It simply is not working. Many other countries have seen their rates fall with the introduction of screening. It's time for the UK to change strategies – our babies deserve it.*"

[Read another post about Group B Strep.](#)

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