



Group B Strep Support

Preventing life-threatening group B Strep infection in newborn babies

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50% of expectant/new Mums have not heard of group B Strep

On average in the UK:

- **One newborn baby a day develops group B Strep infection.**
- **One baby a week dies from group B Strep infection.**
- **One baby each fortnight who survives group B Strep infection suffers long-term mental or physical disabilities.**

National charity Group B Strep Support wants every pregnant woman made aware of group B Strep so that more of these devastating infections in newborn babies can be prevented and for there to be even more healthy baby success stories.

Group B Strep is the most common cause of life-threatening infection in newborn babies – causing septicaemia, pneumonia and meningitis. Carried naturally by 2-3 pregnant women in every 10, group B Strep is rarely dangerous to the Mum but, if passed onto a baby around birth, can have potentially devastating consequences for the baby.

New data from **Bounty's 'Word of Mum'**¹ research panel, released for July's Group B Strep Awareness Month, shows that of the 4,673 new and expectant mums who took part:

- 53% had never heard of group B Strep
- 96% said all pregnant women should be informed about group B Strep
- 94% would take a group B Strep-specific test during their current pregnancy if freely available on the NHS
- 91% said all pregnant women should be told about the option of having the test privately

¹ **Bounty Media Survey Results 2015** Awareness & Perception of group B Strep – conducted 16-31 March 2015. Base survey 4,673 interviews, women in early stages of pregnancy and youngest child 12 months.

- 58% would pay the £35 (approximately) to have the test privately
- 27% couldn't afford the cost of a private test
- 15% did not think the test is needed

Public Health England recently updated guidance on the group B Strep-specific ECM (enriched culture medium) test². Group B Strep Support is calling for these 'gold standard' tests, which cost the NHS £11 each, to be routinely available within the NHS.

Finding out whether a Mum is carrying group B Strep late in pregnancy is safe and easy. Antibiotics (usually narrow-spectrum penicillin) given in labour to women who are carrying group B Strep reduces the baby's risk of infection by over 80%.

Many developed countries routinely offer pregnant women testing for group B Strep carriage and have seen their incidence of group B Strep infections in newborn babies dramatically fall - in Spain by 86%, the USA by over 80% and France by 71%. By contrast, UK, the number has risen by 21% since national 'risk-based' guidelines were introduced in 2003^{3,4}.

Jane Plumb MBE, chief executive of Group B Strep Support says, "Why aren't we telling pregnant women about *group B Strep*? Why aren't we giving our busy health professionals access to *group B Strep* specific tests? If Mum knows she's carrying GBS late in pregnancy, she can make an informed decision about what's best for her and her baby based on fact.

The UK's current guidelines were expected to reduce early-onset group B Strep infections in the UK by up to 60%. They haven't, they've failed – using risk factors to determine which women are likely to be carrying group B Strep is little more than guesswork. It's time to change."

A petition www.change.org/GBS launched on 1 July 2015 (currently over 6,000 signatures) is calling for every pregnant woman to be:

- Offered information about group B Strep
- Offered the GBS-specific ECM test for group B Strep carriage and
- Offered antibiotics in labour if group B Strep is detected during the current pregnancy, or where other recognised risk factors are present

² [Public Health England's UK Standards for Microbiology Investigations B 58.](#)

³ Pyogenic & non-pyogenic streptococcal bacteraemias, England Wales & Northern Ireland, CDR weekly. 2004 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140714084352/http://www.hpa.org.uk/cdr/archives/2004/cdr1604.pdf>

⁴ PHE. Pyogenic & non-pyogenic streptococcal bacteria (EWNi.2013): Public Health England (serial on line) 2014 Health Protection Report. Vol 8 .(44): Bacteraemia https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380500/hpr4414.pdf

For information about group B Strep, visit www.gbss.org.uk.

The Doctors Laboratory (TDL) is offering the ECM test during July for £29 (*normal price £35*). - contact TDL on 020 7397 7373 or visit www.tdlpathology.com

END

For comment

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Editors Notes:

- Group B Strep is the most common cause of life-threatening infection in newborn babies and of meningitis in babies up to the age of 3 months, passing from mother to baby around labour and birth.
- 20-30% of women carry group B Strep, without symptoms and usually without harm.
- Offering intravenous antibiotics (usually penicillin) from the start of labour to pregnant women who carry group B Strep can reduce these infections in newborn babies by 80-90%.
- One in 10 babies sick with group B Strep infection dies, one in 20 of the survivors suffers long-term problems and five in 10 survivors of group B Strep meningitis suffer long-term mental and physical problems, from mild to severe learning disabilities, loss of sight, loss of hearing and lung damage.
- Routine testing of all pregnant women in the UK is not currently recommended by the UK National Screening Committee. This policy is to be reviewed in 2015/6.
- The UK's group B Strep prevention strategy – in place since 2003 - has failed. The rate has not fallen and, by 2013, the actual number of newborn babies with group B Strep infection had risen by 21%. The guidelines had been expected to reduce the incidence by 50-60%.
- The mother carrying group B Strep around delivery is THE key risk factor for group B Strep infection in babies. Countries that routinely screen pregnant women for group B Strep have seen falls in the rate of these infections in newborn babies by up to 86%.

- Providing the 'gold standard' ECM (enriched culture medium) test on the NHS costs £11 per test. Few NHS trusts offer the ECM test, despite there being a UK standard for the test since 2006 (updated June 2015). Home-testing packs are available from a number of private laboratories for around £35.
- In February 2014, Northwick Park Hospital in North West London started offering group B Strep screening to all pregnant women. Results are yet to be published, but initial reports show that the screening programme is effective at preventing group B Strep infection in newborn babies, works in a busy UK setting and is popular with staff and mums alike.
- Group B Strep Support, founded in 1996, is the UK's only independent charity dedicated to preventing preventable group B Strep infections in newborn babies and to helping families make informed decisions about group B Strep.