

Information for Parents

Bacterial Infection

Bacterial infection is a common and important cause of illness in newborn babies.

Infections can be caused by different types of germs, namely, bacteria, viruses and fungi. Bacterial infections are commonly seen in the newborn nursery and are treatable with antibiotics. The information provided in this leaflet is about bacterial infection.

Why did my baby develop an infection?

All newborn babies are born with bacteria, most of which are usually harmless. However, some babies, especially pre-term babies, can go on to get an infection as they have a reduced ability to fight infection, because their immune systems are not yet fully developed.

Are some newborn babies more likely to get infection?

Newborn babies are more prone to develop an infection if:

- They are born prematurely.
- If the membranes (protective sac of fluid surrounding your baby during pregnancy) are broken for more than 24 hours before the baby is born.
- Mother has an infection in her blood, urine or birth canal before the baby's birth.

What are the symptoms of an infection in my baby?

Early symptoms of infection are:

- ◆ Increased need for oxygen/ventilation.
- ◆ Noisy breathing.
- ◆ Poor feeding.
- ◆ Unstable temperature.

What tests will be done on my baby?

All babies with suspected infection require tests that look for infection. The tests may include a full blood count (FBC) which measures C-reactive protein (CRP), which can be increased in infections and blood cultures. In some babies, urine and fluid from the spine, called cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) is also taken to look for infection. A chest X-ray may also be done. It takes two days to obtain the results of blood, urine and CSF cultures. Not all babies need all these tests and the medical staff will decide which tests your baby needs.

How is an infection treated?

The infection is treated with antibiotics. Babies are treated for between 2 and 10 days. Some babies may require treatment for a longer period.

Are antibiotics safe?

The antibiotics used are very safe and serious side effects are extremely rare.

Will my baby recover completely from infection?

Most babies recover completely from infection when treated with antibiotics, however, some babies can become very ill and require a lot of intensive care support.

Will my baby develop more infections than other babies when they get older?

No. The immune system of your baby will mature as the baby gets older and your baby will then be able to fight infections like other children.

What if my baby is found to be colonised with bacteria?

We screen for some bacteria in our unit to prevent spread, but if a bacteria is found on your baby's skin, nose, secretions or stools but they are well, this is described as being colonised. Your baby will not necessarily become sick but may require extra observations and screening.

Who do I ask for more information?

Please ask to speak to one of the senior doctors if you have any questions.