Protect Your Baby from Bleeds – Talk to Your Healthcare Provider about Vitamin K

Protect Your Baby from Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding

Before having a baby, most parents don't give much thought to the vitamin K injection (shot) for their newborn. It's just not something that is talked about during prenatal checkups, even though babies have been routinely given this important shot at birth since the practice was first recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 1961.

Vitamin K is needed for blood to clot normally. Babies are born with very small amounts of vitamin K in their bodies which can lead to serious bleeding problems. Research shows that a single vitamin K shot at birth protects your baby from developing dangerous bleeding which can lead to brain damage and even death. Ask your healthcare provider about the benefits of Vitamin K before your delivery. Protect your newborn by making sure he or she gets the shot after birth.

What is vitamin K deficiency bleeding (VKDB)?

Vitamin K deficiency bleeding or VKDB, is a condition that occurs when the baby does not have enough Vitamin K.

Without enough vitamin K, your baby has a chance of bleeding into his or her intestines, and brain, which can lead to brain damage and even death. Infants who do not receive the vitamin K shot at birth can develop VKDB up to 6 months of age.

How can I prevent VKDB?

The good news is that VKDB is easily prevented. The easiest and most reliable way to give babies vitamin K is by a shot into a muscle in the leg. One shot given after birth will protect your baby from VKDB.

What is vitamin K?

Vitamin K is a vital nutrient that our body needs for blood to clot and stop bleeding. We get vitamin K from the food we eat. Some vitamin K is also made by the good bacteria that live in our intestines.

Babies have very little vitamin K in their bodies at birth because:

Why does my baby need a vitamin K shot?

1. Vitamin K from the mom is not easily shared with the developing baby during the pregnancy
2. The intestine of the newborn baby has very little bacteria so they do not make enough vitamin K on their own.

Without enough vitamin K, blood cannot clot well. As a result, bleeding can occur anywhere in the body. This means not only that bleeding from a cut or bruise may continue for a long time, but that uncontrolled bleeding into the brain and other organs may occur.

National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities
Division of Blood Disorders

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What are the warning signs of VKDB?

In the majority of cases of VKDB, there are NO WARNING SIGNS at all before a life-threatening bleed starts. Babies who do not get a vitamin K shot at birth might develop any of these signs of VKDB:

- Easy bruising especially around the baby's head and face
- Bleeding from the nose or umbilical cord
- Paler than usual skin color or, for dark skinned babies, pale appearing gums
- Yellow eyes after the baby is 3 weeks old
- Blood in the stool, black tarry stool, or vomiting blood
- Irritability, seizures, excessive sleepiness, or a lot of vomiting may all be signs of bleeding in the brain

Did You Know?

About half of all babies who develop VKDB bleed into their brains.

Is Vitamin K safe?

A study from the early 1990's found a possible link between getting vitamin K and developing childhood cancer. Pediatricians became very concerned about this and have done many studies since then, in many different ways, trying to see if this link was true. None of the studies found this link again, even though doctors and scientists looked very hard for it.

Does my baby get vitamin K from breast milk?

Yes, but not enough to prevent VKDB. There is only a little vitamin K in breast milk. Breastfed babies are low in vitamin K for several weeks until they start eating regular foods, usually at 4-6 months, and until the normal intestinal bacteria start making vitamin K.

Should all babies get a vitamin K shot at birth?

Yes. Babies do not have enough vitamin K at birth and are, therefore, at risk for having serious bleeding. Thus, it is very important that all babies get a vitamin K shot to prevent VKDB.

Where can I get more information?

For more information, please visit our website at:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/blooddisorders/index.html