

Methodist

Prophylactic Vitamin K in the Newborn

Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB) (also known as hemorrhagic disease of the newborn) is a clotting disorder of the newborn. VKDB causes spontaneous bleeding, often internal, which can cause brain damage or even death. VKDB is a disease you can prevent by deciding to give your newborn injectable Vitamin K.

There are 3 forms of VKDB – early, classic and late.

- Early bleeding presents within 24 hours of birth and can be severe.
- Classic bleeding occurs within the first week of life. Classic bleeding includes bruising or bleeding which can be life threatening.
- Late bleeding occurs up to six (6) months of age in previously healthy infants. Late bleeding is the most concerning type and when this occurs in the brain, can result in stroke and permanent brain damage. Infants can also experience severe intestinal bleeding.

What causes VKDB?

All babies are normally born with low levels of Vitamin K which is an essential factor in blood clotting. Babies can produce some Vitamin K, but often not enough to prevent this bleeding. Giving injectable Vitamin K at birth immediately gives them enough to prevent VKDB until six (6) months. At that age, a baby can eat food which can provide enough daily Vitamin K to prevent bleeding.

What are the symptoms of VKDB?

The primary symptom of VKDB is bleeding. Bleeding may occur between birth and six (6) months of age and may include:

- Blood in newborn's stools, urine and vomit
- Bleeding from mouth, nose, ears, umbilical cord, or other sites
- Prolonged bleeding from puncture sites (heel prick or injections) or circumcision
- Bruising
- Poor appetite, difficulty breathing, unusual sleepiness, vomiting
- Irritability, agitation, screaming touch sensitivity, spasms
- Fontanel (soft spot) bulging or tight
- Unusual posture, seizures

Why is Vitamin K important for my newborn?

Vitamin K helps blood to clot. Vitamin K is essential to prevent serious bleeding. Newborns do not get enough Vitamin K from their mothers during pregnancy or when they are breastfeeding. Without Vitamin K, babies are at risk of getting VKDB. VKDB can be prevented by giving newborns extra Vitamin K.

How is Vitamin K given?

The easiest and most reliable way to give newborns Vitamin K is by intramuscular injection. One injection immediately after birth will provide adequate protection for many months.

Vitamin K can also be given by mouth; however, oral Vitamin K is less effective than intramuscular Vitamin K, especially with the late onset type of bleeding. Oral Vitamin K is an alternative to giving NO Vitamin K. Oral Vitamin K is not an alternative for intramuscular Vitamin K. Several oral doses are necessary to give enough protection because oral Vitamin K is less effective than intramuscular Vitamin K. If you choose Vitamin K by mouth (oral), your newborn must have three (3) doses.

- Dose 1 at birth
- Dose 2 at 2 weeks of age
- Dose 3 at 8 weeks of age

Does my newborn have to have Vitamin K?

Giving Vitamin K to your newborn is a simple way of preventing a very serious disease. The American Academy of Pediatrics and medical staff of Methodist Health System strongly recommend your newborn be given Vitamin K. It is also important for you to understand that if you choose not to give your newborn Vitamin K, the circumcision procedure will not be performed during your hospital stay. If oral administration of Vitamin K is given, it is recommended to wait a minimum of 12 hours after administration to perform circumcision.

References:

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