

# Fact Sheet

## Group B Streptococcus (GBS)

### What is group B streptococcus (GBS)?

Group B streptococcus (GBS) is a type of bacteria that can cause serious illness in pregnant women, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems, and can be a common cause of life-threatening infections in newborns.

### How is it spread?

Not all individuals that carry the GBS bacteria become ill. In an adult, GBS may be found in the bowel, bladder or throat. GBS is rarely passed between person to person contact. A baby most commonly becomes infected before or during birth.

### Who is at risk?

A baby may be at a higher risk of having GBS if a woman experiences:

- Fever during labour.
- The woman's water breaks 18 or more hours before delivery.
- The birth of the baby is before 37 weeks also called preterm labour..

### What are the symptoms of GBS?

Babies born with GBS develop symptoms within the first week after birth (called "early-onset disease"), and in some cases several months after birth (called "late-onset disease"). The most common illnesses include:

- Infection of the blood referred to as Sepsis ;
- Infection of the fluid and lining that is around the brain referred to as meningitis
- inflammation of the lungs referred to as pneumonia .

### What is the treatment?

Antibiotics are used to treat GBS. It is important that GBS be discovered early . Your health care provider will decide which antibiotic is best to treat the GBS disease.

### How can GBS be prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent GBS disease. GBS disease in infants can be prevented by:

- Testing pregnant women for GBS at 35 to 37 weeks gestation.
- Treating women who carry the bacteria with antibiotics once they begin labour.