

References:

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VITAMIN K

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Author: Eleanor Kelly

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VITAMIN K

The Department of Health (DH) recommends that all newborn babies are given a vitamin K supplement at birth, to avoid the rare but serious condition known as vitamin K deficiency bleeding (previously termed Haemorrhagic Disease of the Newborn).

Vitamin K deficiency bleeding is a non-inherited condition occurring in infants under 6 months of age. It results in spontaneous bruising/bleeding or brain haemorrhage and can be fatal.

WHAT IS VITAMIN K?

Vitamin K is a vitamin which occurs naturally in food especially in liver and some vegetables. We all need Vitamin K. It helps to make blood clot in order to prevent bleeding. During early infancy when fed entirely on milk, babies have very little vitamin K. A very small number of babies suffer bleeding due to vitamin K deficiency. This is called vitamin K deficiency bleeding or VKDB for short. This risk of bleeding is effectively removed when sufficient extra vitamin K is given to babies.

WHAT'S THE RISK?

Very small. VKDB can happen in as many as one in 10,000 full-term babies if they do not get extra vitamin K. But this risk is eliminated when your baby is given a vitamin K supplement.

WHICH BABIES ARE AT GREATER RISK?

Bleeding in the first 24 hours after birth is a particular risk to babies of mothers on certain drugs, such as anti-convulsants (given to people with epilepsy). Bleeding after 24 hours is more common, babies at greater risk are those who:

- ⚙ Are premature
- ⚙ Had a complicated delivery e.g. a forceps delivery
- ⚙ Have liver disease that may show as prolonged jaundice
- ⚙ Fail to take or find it hard to absorb feeds
- ⚙ Are ill for other reasons
- ⚙ Have bleeding or bruising in early infancy.

HOW IS VITAMIN K GIVEN

There are two ways of giving vitamin K - by mouth or by injection. If vitamin K is given by mouth, several doses are needed. An intra-muscular injection of vitamin K only needs to be given once.

RISKS OF VITAMIN K

The DH leaflet, Vitamin K, was produced in 1998, to answer parent's concerns over the possible link between administering vitamin K to newborn babies and leukaemia or any other cancer. A careful review of data from the UK Children's Cancer Study Group in 2003 found no evidence that neonatal vitamin K administration, irrespective of route, influences the risk of children developing leukaemia or any other cancer.