

Vitamin K injection

While giving newborn babies a Vitamin K injection immediately after birth is now a routine procedure, it is your choice whether or not to give Vitamin K to your baby. If you decide that you want your baby to have Vitamin K you can choose either an injection or the oral form of Vitamin K.

Vitamin K is fat-soluble vitamin that plays a role in blood clotting. Prior to birth babies have comparatively low levels of Vitamin K; this is believed to be useful during the time your baby is growing and experiencing periods of rapid cell division and rapid cell replacement. It also helps prevent clotting problems during the birth. Your baby's body maintains these levels very precisely and taking Vitamin K supplements during pregnancy will not result in increased levels of Vitamin K in the unborn baby. The majority of healthy breastfed babies will have blood levels of Vitamin K close to those of an adult within six weeks.

In a very small percentage of babies the low levels of Vitamin K can result in a bleeding disorder now known as Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB).

There are three types of VKDB:

Early VKDB is rare and occurs in the first 24 – 48 hours after birth. It is almost always the result of drugs taken by the mother during pregnancy (anti-epileptic drugs, blood thinning drugs, drugs taken for treating tuberculosis, etc) which inhibit Vitamin K activity in the baby.

Classic VKDB is the most common form and occurs in the first week of life in 2.5 to 15 per 1000 babies. It is associated with an inadequate intake of Vitamin K due to the baby not getting enough Vitamin K-rich colostrum, or not having unlimited access to the breast which prevents the baby getting the high fat Vitamin-K rich content of breastmilk that occurs later in each breastfeed.

Late VKDB is very rare (4.4 – 7.2 per 100,000 babies) and occurs in infants between 2 and 12 weeks of age. Most of these babies have cholestatic liver disease or cystic fibrosis.

For more detailed information on Vitamin K please contact Women's Health Action Trust on (09) 520 5295 or email: info@womens-health.org.nz and request a copy of their 'Vitamin K: does my baby need it' leaflet.