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Vitamin K and Your Newborn

The Canadian Pediatric Society advises that all newborns be given vitamin K by needle within six hours after birth. Vitamin K helps the blood to clot. It helps prevent a bleeding problem that occurs during the first few days and weeks of life. This serious bleeding problem is called hemorrhagic disease of the newborn. If this bleeding problem happens, bleeding can occur anywhere in the body. This includes inside the head which can cause brain damage.

Why do newborns need more Vitamin K?

Newborns have low levels of vitamin K. They cannot reliably get enough from breastmilk or infant formula. The low level of vitamin K causes the serious bleeding problem.

Why does my newborn need to get it by a needle?

Vitamin K helps your baby for longer when it is given by a needle. This is also called giving it by injection. This prevents bleeding problems. The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends it be given this way.

If you do not want your baby to have it given by injection, talk with your health care provider. Giving vitamin K by mouth may be an option. However, when vitamin K is given by mouth it does not protect as well against bleeding and several doses must be given at the right time over the first few months.

How can I help my baby while she or he is given the injection?

- ▶ Hold your baby skin to skin and if possible breastfeed. Research shows that doing either one or both of these comforts your baby and reduces her or his stress. Your nurse will help you position your baby so that the injection can be easily given while you hold and breastfeed your baby. You do not have to watch the needle being given.
- ▶ Partners, if mom is not able to hold the baby you can comfort your baby. Hold your baby skin to skin while the injection is given. Your nurse can help you.

Remember:

- ▶ It is important your newborn be given Vitamin K within 6 hours after birth.
- ▶ Your newborn gets the best protection when Vitamin K is given by injection.
- ▶ Vitamin K helps prevent a serious bleeding problem that occurs in the first days and weeks of life.
- ▶ Hold your baby skin to skin and breastfeed if possible. This comforts and reduces stress for your baby while the injection is given.