

Vitamin K

Information for patients



Leeds
Maternity Care

Vitamin K is also called Konakion MM or Phytomenadione. The Department of Health recommends that all babies be given a Vitamin K supplement when born. This information leaflet is to help you decide if you wish your baby to receive Vitamin K.

Why do newborn babies need Vitamin K?

Vitamin K is essential to all of us as it helps to make the factors in the blood that prevent bleeding. All newborn babies are known to have low levels of Vitamin K in their body. It takes some time for high enough levels to be produced; meanwhile, your baby may be at risk of developing bleeding problems. Very rarely, a newborn baby may start to bleed for no reason.

Vitamin K deficient bleeding

This is a rare condition that can occur because newborn babies do not have sufficient Vitamin K in their body. The condition can cause bleeding from the nose, mouth or into the brain. When it occurs in the brain it may cause brain damage, or even death. It usually occurs when the baby is around 3 - 6 days old, but can also happen later. The risk of Vitamin K deficient bleeding occurring is approximately one in 10,000 full term babies if they do not get extra Vitamin K. This risk is reduced to about 1 in a million by giving Vitamin K.

Which babies are at risk?

All babies are at risk of Vitamin K deficient bleeding if they do not receive Vitamin K; however, for some the risk is greater. Babies are more at risk if they are born prematurely, or if their mother has liver disease or has taken certain medicines during pregnancy. Your midwife or doctor will discuss this with you, if appropriate.

What do we recommend at Leeds Teaching Hospitals?

We strongly recommend that all newborn babies born in Leeds are given Vitamin K. There are two ways to give Vitamin K; either, by mouth, or by injection and you will be offered the choice for your baby.

In Leeds, we recommend that Vitamin K is given by injection as research has shown that this is the most effective way to prevent Vitamin K deficient bleeding. A small volume of Vitamin K is injected into the thigh muscle after birth. If given by injection, your baby only needs one dose of Vitamin K.

If the Vitamin K is given by mouth, all babies will need two doses, one at birth and one at 1 week; if your baby is breast fed, a third dose will be required at 1 month. Vitamin K is already added to bottle milk so that babies fed exclusively on these milks will not require a third dose at 1 month. The reason the baby will require more doses, if given by mouth, is that the baby's digestive system does not absorb the Vitamin K as effectively as when it is given by injection. For this reason, there is a slightly increased risk with the oral route that the baby will develop Vitamin K deficient bleeding.

Please note: other forms of oral Vitamin K are available (capsules). We do not currently issue these from Leeds Teaching Hospitals. If you are given oral Vitamin K by your GP or other healthcare providers, it is important to follow the instructions on the packet as the frequency may differ from the advice above.

Side-effects

There are few known side-effects from Vitamin K. Like any medicine there is a small risk of an allergic reaction. There is a small chance of redness, pain or swelling around the injection site. Vitamin K can sometimes make small babies who are very jaundiced more at risk of serious jaundice but it does not cause jaundice itself.

If you are worried about any of these rare side-effects, please talk to your midwife. We feel that the benefits of treatment strongly outweigh the very small risk of side-effects.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions regarding Vitamin K, then please ask your midwife or doctor.