



Vitamin K shot: Why does my newborn need it?

What is vitamin K?

Vitamin K is an important nutrient. It is used by the body to help blood clot and to stop bleeding.

Where do we naturally get vitamin K from?

Adults get vitamin K from the food we eat, and from bacteria living in our guts. Babies are born with low levels of vitamin K, and do not have enough bacteria to produce vitamin K on their own.¹ The vitamin K shot increases their low vitamin K levels at birth.

Why do babies need vitamin K?

All babies are born with low levels of Vitamin K.² That amount is not enough to prevent a bleeding disorder called “Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding”, also called VKDB.

What is Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB)?

VKDB is a bleeding disorder in babies. It can be prevented by a single shot of vitamin K shortly after birth. Without this shot, VKDB can be fatal for a baby even if there is no physical injury to the baby. VKDB happens when babies cannot stop bleeding because their blood does not have enough vitamin K to form a clot. The bleeding can happen inside or outside the body. When the bleeding is inside the body, it can be hard to notice. A baby with VKDB can bleed into their internal organs, or into the brain, which can lead to brain damage and even death. Most cases of VKDB happen within the first two weeks of life, but babies who do not get the vitamin K shot can be at risk for VKDB up to six months of age.³

Are all babies in New York required to receive vitamin K?

Yes. New York State requires your baby’s medical provider to give vitamin K within six hours of birth to prevent VKDB. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that the vitamin K shot should be given to newborns as an intramuscular dose.⁴ Vitamin K shots have been used since they were first recommended by the AAP in 1961.

Will breastfeeding increase my baby’s vitamin K?

Breastmilk is the most nutritious food for your baby, but it does not have enough vitamin K. Even if a parent eats more vitamin K-rich foods or takes vitamin K supplements during pregnancy or while breastfeeding, babies still won’t have enough vitamin K to prevent VKDB.⁵ The AAP recommends that all newborns, breastfed or formula fed, should receive the vitamin K shot.⁶

What about oral vitamin K?

Oral vitamin K for newborns does not work as well at protecting your baby.⁷ A vitamin K shot given at birth is the best way to prevent Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding.

Are there any potential risks associated with the vitamin K shot?

No. Vitamin K has been safely used to prevent the risk of newborn bleeding since 1961. The vitamin K shot is safe and necessary for your baby.

Will the vitamin K shot hurt?

Parents do not like to see their newborns in pain. Babies have a little discomfort after getting the vitamin K shot.⁸ If you want to soothe your baby after the vitamin K shot, you can breastfeed, hold your baby skin-to-skin or swaddle your baby.⁷ All of these are great ways to comfort babies.

¹ www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/vitamink/faqs.html

² www.mountsinai.org/health-library/diseases-conditions/vitamin-k-deficiency-bleeding-of-the-newborn

³ www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/vitamink/faqs.html

⁴ www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/prenatal/delivery-beyond/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Administration-of-Vitamin-K.aspx

⁵ <https://health.ucsd.edu/specialties/obgyn/maternity/resources/Documents/Vit%20K%20fact%20sheet.pdf>

⁶ www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-special-circumstances/diet-and-micronutrients/vitamin-k.html

⁷ www.med.umich.edu/llibr/Pediatrics/VitaminKQuestionsAndAnswers.pdf

⁸ www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/childbirth-and-beyond/your-babys-first-hours-life

