



Vitamin K for Newborns: What Parents Should Know

Pediatric Patient Education Handout

What Is Vitamin K?

Vitamin K is a vitamin that helps the blood clot properly and prevents serious bleeding. Newborn babies are born with very low levels of vitamin K, which puts them at risk for dangerous bleeding.

Why Do Newborns Need Vitamin K?

Babies are born with low vitamin K because:

- Very little vitamin K crosses the placenta during pregnancy
- Breast milk contains only small amounts of vitamin K
- A newborn's gut does not yet have the bacteria needed to make vitamin K

Without enough vitamin K, babies are at risk for Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB).

What Is Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB)?

VKDB is a rare but serious bleeding condition that can occur in newborns and young infants.

Bleeding may occur:

- In the brain
- In the intestines
- From the umbilical cord or circumcision site

VKDB can be life-threatening and may cause permanent brain damage.

How Is Vitamin K Given?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all newborns receive one injection of vitamin K shortly after birth.

- Given as a single shot in the thigh
- Works immediately and lasts for months
- Has been used safely for decades

Is the Vitamin K Shot Safe?

Yes. The vitamin K injection:

- Does not contain preservatives linked to long-term health problems
- Does not cause autism
- Has been used in millions of babies worldwide

Side effects are rare and usually mild, such as temporary soreness at the injection site.

What About Oral Vitamin K?

Oral vitamin K is less effective than the injection because:

- It does not last as long
- It requires multiple doses
- It may not be absorbed well
- It does not protect as well against late-onset bleeding

For this reason, the vitamin K shot is the preferred and safest option.

Important Facts for Parents

- Babies who do not receive vitamin K are much more likely to develop serious bleeding
- VKDB can happen days to months after birth
- Bleeding may occur without warning signs

Our Recommendation

We strongly recommend the vitamin K injection for all newborns to help protect them from preventable, serious bleeding complications.

Questions? – We understand parents may have questions or concerns. Please talk with your pediatric provider. We are happy to discuss this further.