



# Vitamin K for Newborns: What Parents Should Know

*Pediatric Patient Education Handout*

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## 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.

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## 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).**

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## 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.**

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## 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
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## 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.**

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## 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.**

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## 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
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## Our Recommendation

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

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