



Vitamin K

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Why do babies need vitamin K?

All babies are born with low levels of vitamin K because it is not passed from mother to baby. Vitamin K is essential for blood clotting and low levels can cause serious bleeding in some babies. This is called Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB). There are two main forms of VKDB. One form occurs in the first week of life and all babies are at risk. Another form occurs between one and four months of age mostly in babies who drink only breast milk and did not receive vitamin K at birth. This is because breast milk is low in vitamin K¹. The risk of VKDB in infants who do not get the vitamin K injection is low. However, if bleeding occurs it can be severe and deadly.

Where can Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding happen?

Bleeding may be seen at any of the following places:

- Umbilical cord
- Kidney
- Abdomen/intestinal tract- can cause shock and organ damage.
- Circumcision site
- Skin/soft tissues- visible as large bruises
- Central nervous system/brain- can result in brain damage and/or death

When does my baby receive the Vitamin K injection?

UNC Hospitals and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that all babies get vitamin K within one hour of birth. The injection will prevent both forms of VKDB. The vitamin K injection is safe. Side effects are rare, as with all injections mild pain at the injection site is possible.

Can oral vitamin K be given instead of the injection?

Vitamin K in oral form is not approved for use in the United States. Studies have not shown if oral vitamin K is effective, therefore it is not recommended.

Approved by Women's Hospital Patient Education Steering Committee January 21, 2014

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Fetus and Newborn. Controversies concerning vitamin K and the newborn. *Pediatrics*. 2003; 112:191-192