

Possible Infection

Information for parents

Your baby is being treated or tested because of the risk of infection. The usual reason for this check is that the baby has been at risk due to problems in labour or has some problems like a temperature, fast breathing, lack of energy or poor feeding.

What is wrong?

Babies can develop an infection just like adults. For example they may get pneumonia or a urine infection. Because babies are small and cannot tell us what is wrong we give them treatment to prevent problems, rather than wait and see.

What causes infection?

Your baby may have or be suspected of having either an 'early' or 'late' infection.

Early infection is suspected within the first 48 hours of life and is usually caused by a 'bug' (bacteria) that the baby has come into contact with either in the uterus or during the process of being born. These are bacteria that live harmlessly in the mother's body but may cause problems if they get into the baby's system. Babies at most risk are those in which the mother has had a high temperature before baby is born or in cases where the waters broke more than 12 hours before the birth. Premature babies are also at higher risk.

Late infection is suspected if the baby gets unwell after about 48 hours. It is most likely to be caused by organisms (bacteria or viruses) that the baby has come into contact with in the hospital. Babies, particularly if they are premature, have low resistance so any signs of infection are taken very seriously.

Babies are more likely to get an infection if:

The waters broke more than 12 hours before birth.

The mother has a temperature during labour.

The baby is born before it is due.

Is it serious?

Most infections are not serious for the baby. The doctors will tell you if they think an infection is serious.

What are the tests?

A blood count to check the number of white blood cells.

A blood test and a urine test to see if any bugs grow.

Possibly a spinal fluid test to see if any bugs grow.

A chest x-ray.

What is the treatment?

Your baby will have a drip and be given antibiotics this way.

Sometimes a baby may need other treatment like oxygen.

How long?

Some babies will turn out not to have an infection and will only be given antibiotics for 48 hours.

All other babies are given antibiotics for as long as is needed. This is usually five days but can be longer.

Any baby who is feeding normally and is not too sick can be with the mother on the postnatal ward.

Special checks

Unless the baby has been very sick there will be no need for special checks after going home.

This leaflet provides a guide only. If you have concerns or want more information about your baby, ask the doctor or nurse providing your baby's care.