

Vitamin K (Konakion)

Information for parents

This guide is to explain the reasons for National Women's Hospital recommending vitamin K injections for newborn infants.

Definitions

Vitamin K: Is essential for normal blood clotting. It is contained in some foods and it is also produced in the gut by the action of bacteria.

IM: Means an injection into muscle.

Classical HDN: Is classic haemorrhagic disease of the newborn, which is bleeding in the first seven days of life. It is serious in about 1 case in 10,000 births.

Late HDN: late haemorrhagic disease of the newborn which is bleeding between one week and about six months of age. It occurs in between 4-8 cases per 100,000 births. About half the cases are serious.

Serious Bleeding: Means bleeding which causes significant brain or other organ damage or death.

Who is at risk of bleeding?

All babies are deficient in Vitamin K and therefore at risk.
Breastfed babies have a greater risk than formula fed babies, as breast milk has very low levels of Vitamin K, whereas formula is much more rich in this Vitamin.

Babies whose mothers have been on some sort of medication during pregnancy, such as anti-convulsants (Dilantin or Phenobarbitone) or anti-tuberculosis drugs (for instance Rifampicin).

Premature and sick babies.

Why give vitamin K to Babies?

Vitamin K prevents haemorrhagic disease as shown.

*** The research and some comments**

One paper said that babies who had been given IM Vitamin K at birth had twice the chance of developing childhood cancer as babies given oral or no Vitamin K.

Since this study was published several major studies have looked at the question again. All of the studies from North America, Europe and Australia have shown no link at all between IM Vitamin K and cancer.

The rate of childhood cancer has not increased in Great Britain, the USA or Europe since IM Vitamin K was introduced.

Since some countries have swapped to oral Vitamin K, there have been published reports of severe or fatal bleeding in infants who have received Vitamin K orally.

What are the recommendations at National Women's Hospital?

All babies need Vitamin K.

Intramuscular Vitamin K in a dose of 1mg is recommended.

It is possible to give babies Vitamin K orally. However we do not recommend this as:

There may be doubt as to whether the dose has been swallowed.

There is risk that the later dose may be forgotten!

If parents choose to give Vitamin K orally, the dose is 2mg given 3 times – at birth, at 5-7 days and at 6 weeks.

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.