

Infection and your baby

What is an infection?

- An infection is an illness caused by germs such as bacteria, viruses or a fungus.
- When germs attack the body, the body's immune system fights back.
- White blood cells are sent to fight and destroy the germs.

Why do babies get infections?

Babies, especially premature babies, can get infections very easily. The immune system, which is needed to fight germs, is not fully developed in these babies. Your baby may get sick because he or she may not be able to fight the germs causing the infection.

Babies can get infections in these areas of the body:

- blood
- lungs
- spinal fluid around the brain
- bowels
- eyes
- skin
- bone
- urine

These infections can be caused by germs that are:

- inside the uterus, called a congenital infection
- entering the uterus through a break in the amniotic membrane (when your "water" breaks early)
- in the birth passage
- on people's hands
- in the nursery, called hospital associated infection

What are the signs of an infection?

- a low body temperature or a fever
- a fast heart rate
- pale, white, grey or blue coloured skin
- low blood pressure
- low or high blood sugar
- difficulty breathing, needing oxygen or a ventilator
- apnea – when the baby stops breathing
- the baby is not feeding well
- milk is left in the stomach after several feedings, called residuals
- the baby is less active or more sleepy
- the baby is irritable and cries a lot

How do you know if my baby has an infection?

To check for an infection, your baby will have a series of tests. These tests include:

- checking for germs in one or more of these areas:
 - blood
 - lung secretions
 - spinal fluid
 - stool (bowel movements)
 - drainage from the eyes
 - skin
 - urine
- counting the white blood cells (WBC) in a small sample of blood
- checking for infection with an x-ray of the chest and abdomen

It can take up to 5 days to get the results from all the tests. There are times when we are not able to find out how a baby got an infection. Sometimes, a baby shows signs of an infection, but the tests do not show where or what kind of infection is present. Sometimes, the way a baby reacts to other problems can look like the signs of an infection.

What can be done to treat an infection?

- Your baby may need treatment with antibiotics.
- Antibiotics cannot help an infection caused by a virus. A few virus and fungus infections can be treated with special medications.

What can be done to prevent infections?

Try to keep your baby's environment as germ free as possible:

- Clean your hands before and after you visit with your baby. This helps prevent germs from entering or leaving the nursery. Please follow the hand washing instructions in the Welcome to Neonatal booklet.
- If you get a cold, cold sore, or any other illness, please check with your baby's nurse before you visit the nursery.
- To come into the nursery, all parents, siblings and visitors **MUST** be free of cough, fever, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and experience no new breathing problems.



Stop the spread of germs and infection. Just clean your hands.



This fact sheet provides basic general information only and is to be used as a quick guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. If you have any further questions, ask Infection Prevention & Control, your physician or health care provider.