



Testing your baby for infection or low blood sugar

Sometimes, babies need to be tested to make sure they don't have an infection or a problem with blood sugar. Finding and treating these problems early will help make sure your baby stays as healthy as possible.

Tests for infection

Sometimes, babies can be exposed to infection during late pregnancy or delivery. Newborn babies who might have an infection need to be evaluated so that treatment can begin right away if infection occurs.

Your health care team will review the history of your pregnancy and your baby's birth. If there is a risk of infection, your baby will be evaluated in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Transfer to the NICU for this evaluation does not necessarily mean your baby is sick. The transfer is done because the NICU is the best place for newborn specialists to fully evaluate your baby. Once the evaluation is complete, your baby will be moved to the postpartum floor if she/he does not appear ill.

As part of the NICU evaluation, we will do blood tests on your baby, which require less than ½ teaspoon of his/her blood. These blood tests help us see whether or not your baby needs treatment for infection. The two main tests are:

CBC: The first blood test, a CBC (complete blood count), shows if the baby's body is responding to a possible infection. The CBC results are ready within a few hours. If the CBC and/or the history suggest an increased chance of infection, the baby will be given antibiotics through a baby-sized intravenous (IV) line. After the IV is in place, the first dose of antibiotics will be given in the NICU. The remaining doses will be given in the nursery on the postpartum floor if the baby is not showing signs of illness.

Blood culture: The second blood test is called a blood culture, and it takes a few days before the results are complete. This test shows if there is an actual infection in the blood. If no infection is seen on this test in 48 hours and the baby continues to be well, any antibiotic treatment that has been started can usually be stopped. If an infection is present or is highly likely, the antibiotic treatment will be continued for a longer time – usually at least seven to ten days. If this happens, your pediatrician will give you more information about what to expect.

Tests for low blood sugar

Babies who are either large or small for their age, and/or babies whose mothers had diabetes during pregnancy, have a greater chance of having low blood sugar in the first hours of life.

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The nurses will check the blood sugar on these babies within an hour of birth, and every one to two hours after that until at least six hours after birth. These tests require only a drop of the baby's blood and can be done in the delivery room or on the postpartum unit. Babies with low blood sugar may need some extra sugar that can be obtained through feeding. If you are breastfeeding, you will be encouraged to breastfeed early and frequently. If you have chosen not to breastfeed, we will work with you to determine what feedings your baby might need. In rare cases, a baby with low blood sugar may need to be admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) for intravenous (IV) sugar.

Remember, most babies who are tested for infection or low blood sugar do not have either of these conditions. And babies who do have these problems can receive early treatment. Please speak to your baby's health care team if you have any questions or concerns about your baby's care.