



## UK NSC group B streptococcus (GBS) recommendation

Following a review of the evidence against strict criteria, the UK NSC does not currently recommend introducing a national screening programme for carriage of group B streptococcus (GBS).

GBS is a common form of bacteria. It is present in both male and females and is usually harmless.

Unfortunately GBS can pass from the mother to the baby in labour. This usually causes no ill effects but in a small number of cases it can result in illness.

GBS in the first seven days of life is called Early Onset GBS infection (EOGBS). If the infection occurs after this point it is known as Late Onset disease (LOGBS).

The vast majority of babies that are affected by the infection will fully recover. For a few there may be long term disability and sadly some will die.

It has been suggested that offering screening at 35 to 37 weeks of pregnancy will help detect which women carry GBS, so that they can be treated with antibiotics at the start of labour to avoid EOGBS affecting their baby.

### Key findings supporting the UK NSC recommendation

- carriage of GBS changes with time. A woman may be found carrying GBS when screened at 35 to 37 weeks, but it may no longer be present at labour
- there is no way to predict which babies will be affected by EOGBS and which will be born without complications
- the treatment for preventing EOGBS in babies is giving antibiotics to the mother during labour. There is serious concern that large numbers (tens of thousands) of women will be offered and take antibiotics when they do not need to. The long term effects of antibiotics for mother and baby are unknown
- it is not clear whether benefits associated with screening outweigh the harms for the majority of the population
- the proportion of babies affected by EOGBS in the UK is similar to the level reported in countries that have introduced screening

The UK NSC regularly reviews its recommendations on screening for different conditions in the light of new research evidence becoming available.

To find out more about the UK NSC's GBS recommendation, please visit:

[legacyscreening.phe.org.uk/groupbstreptococcus](http://legacyscreening.phe.org.uk/groupbstreptococcus)

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) advises ministers and the NHS in the 4 UK countries about all aspects of screening and supports implementation of screening programmes.

Find out more about the UK National Screening Committee at [www.gov.uk/uknsc](http://www.gov.uk/uknsc). The UK NSC evidence review process is described at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nsc-evidence-review-process](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nsc-evidence-review-process) and a list of all UK NSC recommendations can be found at [legacy.screening.nhs.uk/recommendations](http://legacy.screening.nhs.uk/recommendations)

The UK NSC secretariat is hosted by Public Health England ([www.gov.uk/phe](http://www.gov.uk/phe)).