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Group B Strep Screening in Pregnancy

A third of all women are carriers of Group B Strep. It is common for these bacteria to be present around the vagina and the rectum. The presence of these bacteria does not represent an infection; rather it is normal flora, meaning it belongs there. There is no risk to your health if you are a carrier of Group B Strep, nor can the carrier state be effectively eradicated with oral antibiotics. If a newborn were to contract Group B Strep, however, a serious infection could result. Because of the potential risk this bacteria poses, a great deal of research has been done. Specialists have proven that such infections can be prevented by treating a mother who is a carrier of Group B Strep with antibiotics during labor.

At Southern New Hampshire Medical Center, in an effort to prevent transmission of Group B Strep to the newborn and possible neonatal infection, all the Obstetricians have adopted a universal screen protocol. This means that **every pregnancy women are screened for Group B Strep at 35-36 weeks gestation**. The screening test is a simple swab of the vagina and rectum that is then cultured in the lab to see if Group B Strep is present. This test is completed in 36-48 hours and determines which women are Group B Strep carriers and which ones are not. You will be informed of your test results during your next visit.

Those women who are not Group B Strep carriers likely will not have an affected infant. Those women who are Group B Strep carriers are treated with Penicillin (or another antibiotic if allergic) during labor. This antibiotic regimen should virtually eliminate the risk of a Strep infection in full term infants. Furthermore, the pediatrician will have the comfort of knowing if the infant was exposed to Group B Strep and be able to use this information in their assessment of any possible signs of an infection in a newborn.

This program began in August of 1994 and we are keeping careful records of our babies' outcomes. At Southern New Hampshire Medical Center, we feel that this program is painless, cost effective, and an evidence-base way to deal with the problem of Group B Strep. If you have any questions about the test please feel free to ask your health care provider.