

newborn medications

Many states in the United States require that all newborns receive preventative medicine for potentially serious diseases and infections. Most states (but not all states) give parents the right to decline standard newborn medications. Your midwife will know the laws in your state. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) state the following medications are safe and recommend them for all newborns born in the United States.

Hepatitis B Vaccine

Hepatitis B is a severe liver disease that is spread through bodily fluids such as blood, saliva, semen, and vaginal secretions. It can lead to liver cancer. The best way to prevent hepatitis B infection is from immunization. The hepatitis B vaccine is usually given within 24 hours of birth. Two more doses are given during later pediatric appointments.

Why do babies need the hepatitis B vaccine?

It is recommended to give all babies the hepatitis B vaccine at birth in case the birthing person's hepatitis B infection was missed. Newborns born to people who are hepatitis B positive have a higher risk of hepatitis B infection. Newborns may also be exposed to hepatitis B from friends or family members who do not know they have hepatitis B. Studies show that starting the vaccine series at birth makes it more likely that the vaccine series will be completed.

What are the benefits of the hepatitis B vaccine?

Repeated studies show that the hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective for most newborns. When given the three hepatitis B vaccine shots, a person may be immune to hepatitis B for 30 years.

What are the risks of the hepatitis B vaccine?

The most common side effects are mild and can include low-grade fever, pain or redness at the injection site, and vomiting. No long-term side effects have been shown in newborns who receive the hepatitis B vaccine.

What are the alternatives of the hepatitis B vaccine?

Currently, there are no alternatives to the hepatitis B vaccine. An alternative to receiving the shot at the hospital is to wait until a later pediatric appointment to start the hepatitis B vaccine series. This can delay the start of immunization and should be discussed with the baby's pediatrician before the baby is born.

Erythromycin Eye Ointment

Erythromycin eye ointment is used on newborn babies within the first hours of birth. Babies can be exposed to viruses or bacteria in the birth canal that can cause an infection of their eyes. This infection can lead to scarring of the eye or blindness in newborns in as little as 24 hours. The most common and most dangerous causes of bacterial eye infection in newborns are chlamydia (most common) and gonorrhea (most dangerous). Staph and strep bacteria from the mother, hospital, or home may also cause newborn eye infections that are not as serious and are easily treated.

I don't have chlamydia or gonorrhea. Does the baby need eye ointment?

Most pregnant individuals are tested and treated for sexually transmitted infections during their prenatal care; however, there is the possibility that an infection was acquired after testing. Many people with a sexually transmitted infection do not have symptoms. There are other viruses and bacteria, such as staph and strep bacteria, that may also enter the newborn's eyes and cause infection. For these reasons, all babies are treated with preventative eye ointment.

What are the benefits of erythromycin eye ointment?

The erythromycin eye ointment is safe. If a pregnant person develops gonorrhea or chlamydia after the routine screening or is not adequately treated before giving birth, the eye ointment may help prevent severe eye infections.

What are the risks of erythromycin eye ointment?

Rarely, babies can have irritation that causes redness and swelling of the eyes (sometimes called "chemical pink eye"). It is not permanent, and usually goes away within 24-36 hours.

The ointment can cause blurry vision for the newborn, which can potentially interfere with bonding from early eye gazing. This goes away within 1-2 hours. Though it is very effective, erythromycin eye ointment is not 100% effective at preventing newborn pink eye from gonorrhea or other bacteria. This is because some types of bacteria are resistant to this medication.

What are the alternatives to erythromycin eye ointment?

Screening for, and treating, pregnant people for gonorrhea and chlamydia during pregnancy is one way to help prevent newborn pink eye and prevent other complications for pregnant people. Some studies show that a few drops of colostrum to the newborn's eyes is effective at decreasing the rates of newborn pink eye from staph bacteria (this is not the bacteria that causes gonorrhea or chlamydia). Waiting to see if any eye infection starts to develop is also an option. If this is what is chosen, it is important to get immediate treatment for the newborn for any signs of pus-producing pink eye.

Vitamin K

Vitamin K is used by the body to clot blood and stop bleeding. It is made by the good bacteria in our intestines (gut). If people do not have enough vitamin K, they can bleed longer and bruise more easily. Sometimes this bleeding can be dangerous, especially to babies. Newborns are born with small amounts of vitamin K and do not get very much from human milk. The AAP has recommended the vitamin K shot for newborns since 1961. Their recommendation is based on decades of experience and research that show the vitamin K shot is safe and effective.

Why do babies need a vitamin K shot?

Newborn babies do not yet have the gut bacteria to make vitamin K when they are born. Human milk also does not have the vitamin K babies need. For these reasons, it is recommended that babies get a vitamin K shot in the hours after birth to prevent a potentially life threatening bleeding complication. Infants who are exclusively fed with human milk and infants of Asian descent are more likely to have bleeds happen until they are six months old.

What are the benefits of the Vitamin K shot?

The vitamin K shot is very effective at decreasing dangerous bleeding in newborns through the first six months after birth.

Are there risks to the vitamin K shot?

Newborns might have pain at the injection site, bruising, and swelling; all of these are temporary and go away on their own. Pain during the injection can be decreased by holding the baby skin-to-skin during the shot and/or feeding the baby during the shot. No studies have shown any long- or short-term risks to the vitamin K or other ingredients in the medication.

Are there alternatives to the vitamin K shot?

Currently, there are no recommended alternatives to the vitamin K shot. Oral vitamin K is not currently approved by the FDA in the United States.

Can I decline these medications?

There are people who choose to opt out of some or all of these medications. If you have questions or think you might want to decline newborn medications, please talk to your midwife so that you can have the most up-to-date information and make an informed choice.

References

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