Jaundice in newborn babies
Information for parents and carers

About jaundice

Most newborn babies have jaundice. If your baby has jaundice, their skin will look slightly yellow or suntanned. Sometimes the whites of the eyes or the inside of the mouth or gums will also look yellow. If your baby has dark skin, the main sign may be yellowing in the whites of their eyes or inside their mouth.

For most babies jaundice is harmless and nothing for you to worry about. If you think that your baby has jaundice, it is always best to let your midwife or doctor know.

Jaundice is caused by too much 'bilirubin' in the blood. Bilirubin is a chemical in the body that is normally passed out of the body in urine and stool (faeces).

How should I check if my baby has jaundice?

It is important that you check your baby for jaundice, particularly during the first week of life.

Check if your baby's skin looks yellow. The yellow colour usually starts on the face and forehead and then spreads to the body, arms and legs.

Check if the whites of your baby's eyes look yellow.

Check if the gums or roof of your baby's mouth looks yellow. The best time to do this is when your baby is crying and their mouth is open wide.

From time-to-time, gently press your baby's skin to see if you can see a yellow tinge.

A good time to check your baby is when you are changing their nappy or clothes. Try to check in bright and preferably natural light. Ask your midwife to show you how to check your baby for jaundice, if you are not sure. Your midwife and doctor will also look for signs of jaundice each time they check your baby.

What should I do if I think that my baby has jaundice?

For most babies, jaundice is mild, harmless and clears up by itself. **It is important that you tell your midwife or your doctor if you notice that your baby's skin, the whites of their eyes or the inside of their mouth or gums have a yellow colour.**

If this happens **in the first 24 hours after birth,** contact them **urgently**. This could be a sign of another medical problem.

If your baby is more than 24 hours old, contact them on the same day that you notice the change in colour.

You should also tell your midwife or doctor if your baby passes pale, chalky coloured stools or dark urine that stains the nappy.

How will I know if my baby has jaundice?

If it looks like your baby has jaundice, then it is important that the level of bilirubin is measured. The doctor or midwife shouldn't rely on visual inspection alone to estimate the bilirubin level. Measuring the level of bilirubin can be done very simply for most babies, using a special hand-held device placed briefly on the skin (a 'bilirubinometer'). It won't hurt your baby. However, babies whose bilirubinometer reading is high, babies who are less than 24 hours old and some babies born prematurely (who are aged less than 35 weeks of pregnancy) will need a blood test. This is usually taken from your baby's heel to measure the amount of bilirubin in your baby's blood.

What treatment will my baby be given?

Mild jaundice does not normally need any treatment, but your midwife will need to give you extra advice and support with breastfeeding to make sure that your baby is feeding adequately and correctly.

If the level of bilirubin in your baby's blood is high, they may need to go into hospital to get treatment. Your baby may be given light treatment known as 'phototherapy'. Your baby will be placed under a lamp that shines a special type of light onto the skin. This light helps to break down the bilirubin, which will then be passed out of your baby's body in their urine and stools.

The doctors or nurses or another healthcare worker will take a blood test to measure the amount of bilirubin in your baby's blood every 6 hours. You will be encouraged to take your baby out from under the lamp for short breaks for feeds, nappy changes and cuddles.

Does jaundice cause any long-term problems?

For most babies, jaundice does not cause any long-term problems. Very rarely, the amount of bilirubin in a baby's blood is so high that it does cause long-term problems such as hearing loss or cerebral palsy. But you should remember that this is extremely rare and that with the right treatment this small risk is reduced even further.

What should I do if my baby's jaundice does not clear up?

For most babies, jaundice clears up within a few days. If your baby has jaundice for more than 2 weeks (or for more than 3 weeks for babies that were born premature), make sure that you tell your midwife or doctor. Your baby may need further tests to check for other medical problems.

Where can I find out more information?

NHS Choices website	**www.nhs.uk/conditions/Jaundice-newborn**
NICE website	**www.nice.org.uk/guidance/CG98**
Children's Liver Disease Foundation website	**www.childliverdisease.org/education/yellowalert**

Contact numbers

For urgent problems please ring:

Calderdale Birth Centre
Telephone No: 01422 224417

Huddersfield Birth Centre
Telephone No: 01484 342608

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Matron Community Midwifery Manager
Calderdale Royal Hospital
Telephone (01422) 222114

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obrat'te se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym fomacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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