

# Why Experts Recommend the Vitamin K Shot for Your Baby

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## What is vitamin K and where does it come from?

- Vitamin K is a vitamin needed to help the blood clot (clump together and stop bleeding).
- It is found in green vegetables and made by bacteria in the intestines of adults and children.
- Newborn babies naturally have very low amounts of vitamin K because:
  - Vitamin K does not cross the placenta well.
  - Formula does not have enough vitamin K to fully protect your baby from bleeding problems.
  - Breast milk has even less vitamin K than formula, which puts breast fed babies at even higher risk for bleeding problems.
  - It takes time for babies to make their own healthy gut bacteria.

## Why does my baby need a vitamin K shot?

- A newborn baby that does not get the vitamin K shot after birth is at risk for having uncontrolled bleeding called Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB).
- This bleeding can occur anywhere in the body including the brain (stroke).
- This risk of bleeding can last for many months.
- Babies with VKDB often need to be admitted to the hospital for blood transfusions and/or surgery. Some babies end up with permanent disabilities and some babies even die.

## What are the benefits of getting the vitamin K shot?

- The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended the vitamin K shot to prevent VKDB for newborns since 1961.
- Almost all cases of VKDB can be prevented with a small one-time vitamin K shot.
- Because the shot works so well, the disease is rare now and most people have never even heard of it. This means some parents may not be aware of how dangerous VKDB can be.

## What are the risks of not getting the vitamin K shot?

- Refusing the vitamin K shot can be very dangerous for your baby. A baby that does not get the vitamin K shot after birth is at risk for having uncontrolled bleeding (VKDB).
- According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), babies who do not get the vitamin K shot at birth are 81 times more likely to develop late VKDB than infants who do receive the vitamin K shot at birth.
- It is recommended that baby boys should not be circumcised if they do not receive the vitamin K shot.

## What are the risks of getting the vitamin K shot?

- Your baby may have temporary redness or soreness where the shot was given. Allergic reactions are extremely rare.
- Some parents may have heard about the possibility of a link between the vitamin K shot and leukemia (blood cancer). A single, small study from the 1990s did raise concern for a possible link between giving the vitamin K shot and future childhood cancer, but no link has ever been confirmed. The American

## REFERENCES FOR PARENT:

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Academy of Pediatrics has concluded that there is no link between the vitamin K shot and childhood cancer or any other cancers. Many other studies have also disproven this link.

- The vitamin K shot is not an immunization and it does not contain any toxins.

## Are there other options beside the vitamin K shot?

- The best way to prevent bleeding problems in newborn babies is to give a one-time shot of vitamin K, immediately after birth.
- Parents who refuse the vitamin K shot may choose to give vitamin K in the mouth but this is not as effective as giving the vitamin K shot. Your baby will still be at risk for VKDB.
- Oral vitamin K is not approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and is not offered at Maine Medical Center.

## If I decide against the vitamin K shot, what signs of VKDB should I watch for?

- Classic VKDB typically occurs between 1-7 days old. Late-onset VKDB can occur as late as 3-6 months old.
- In the majority of cases of VKDB, there are **no warning signs** before life-threatening bleeding occurs. It can also start quickly, without any early warning signs.
- Signs of bleeding into the brain can include: seizures, irregular breathing, color change, irritability, excessive sleepiness, or unusual vomiting.
- Other signs include: pale skin, bleeding from the mouth, nose, or belly button; blood in the urine; blood in the stool (which can be red or a black color); bruising, or petechiae (tiny brown-purple spots under the skin).

## Where can I find more information?

- Talk to your child's pediatrician or pharmacist, or look online at AAP.org or CDC.gov.

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**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**

New fact sheet: how to protect your baby from bleeds:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/blooddisorders/documents/vitamin-k.pdf>

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Vitamin K deficiency bleeding. Updated December 12, 2017:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/vitamink/index.html>