

EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001 THURSDAY 5th OCTOBER 2006

GROUP B STREP SURVEY AND CAMPAIGN

GROUP B STREP BACTERIA KILLS 75 NEWBORN BRITISH BABIES A YEAR

- YET THE NHS DOES NOTHING TO PREVENT IT

AND NINE OUT OF 10 PREGNANT WOMEN HAVE 'NEVER EVEN HEARD ABOUT IT'

A staggering nine out of 10 pregnant women have 'never heard' about Group B Strep bacteria which infects 700 newborn babies each year in Britain and kills 75, according to an in-depth study by Pregnancy & Birth Magazine.

A further 40 babies are left with serious long-term mental or physical problems, yet Group B Strep is totally preventable with simple antibiotic treatment for the mother before or during labour.

Not only does the NHS fail to offer ANY screening of pregnant women for this preventable infection, the PREGNANCY & BIRTH Magazine study shows the NHS has 'totally failed to raise awareness' about Group B Strep and 'inform pregnant women about its dangers'.

Only 2% of the 1,000 pregnant women and new mothers surveyed by Pregnancy & Birth Magazine had been informed about Group B Strep (GBS) at an 'antenatal class' and only 3% 'by their GP'. But even TWO-THIRDS of these 'had no idea how dangerous GBS can be'.

As a result, nearly ALL pregnant women in the UK remain completely unaware of the deadly consequences of this common bacteria.

Worse still, Pregnancy & Birth Magazine says a significant number of Midwives, GPs and even obstetricians are also not fully informed or aware of the dangers of GBS and the correct course of treatment.

GBS is a normal bacterium carried by around 30% of adults at any one time. It can be passed from mother to baby during labour (when the baby passes down the birth canal) and although for most babies this causes no problems, for others it can be deadly, causing blood poisoning, Meningitis and Pneumonia. Yet if a pregnant woman is tested for the bacteria during the later stages of pregnancy and found to be positive, simple antibiotic treatment, usually Penicillin, before or during labour can prevent the infection spreading to her newborn baby.

In America, pregnant women are routinely screened for GBS, but in the UK a reliable test is only available privately at a cost of £32. When told about this test by Pregnancy and Birth Magazine, an overwhelming 92% of the pregnant women surveyed say they would 'pay to have it done', even though 40% say they 'couldn't really afford it'.

And 100% of the pregnant women and new mothers surveyed say 'all pregnant women should be automatically told about GBS by their GP or midwife and be offered a free reliable test on the NHS during the last few weeks of pregnancy.'

At present only 0.5% of pregnant women are tested each year in the UK, yet evidence clearly shows that screening and antibiotic treatment given to women with the bacteria during labour prevents up to 80% of all GBS infections in newborn babies.

Sarah Hart, the Editor of PREGNANCY & BIRTH Magazine, which has led this in-depth study and is urgently campaigning for all pregnant women to be given free routine testing for GBS on the NHS, says: "It is a disgrace that all these babies are dying needlessly. Britain is not a Third World country, but in this respect it has a Third World Health Service. We urgently need a reliable routine GBS testing programme on the NHS before more babies die of this common bacteria. It is an absolute scandal nothing is being done.

"It is equally astonishing that huge numbers of midwives, GPs and even obstetricians don't know how to properly treat GBS when faced with it. The Pregnancy & Birth Magazine research shows that some GPs prescribe antibiotics during pregnancy when, in fact, they only work to prevent a baby being infected with GBS if they are given to a pregnant women intravenously during labour itself."

More follows.....

Pregnant women who would like a GBS test should contact The Doctors Laboratory on 0207 307 7373 or log onto gbs@tdlpathology.com. Packs containing the necessary swabs can be obtained free and a postal service for carrying out the test costs £32.

Sarah Hart says: "It is terrible women have to do this test on their own with no back up from health professionals. Pregnancy is daunting enough for many women without having to take complex medical issues into their own hands."

Note: GBS is a naturally occurring bacterium in the human body of both women and men. The bacterium lives in the vagina or intestine. It is NOT a sexually transmitted disease and is not present because of a woman's sex life. If a pregnant woman is carrying the GBS bacteria, her baby can swallow or inhale the bacteria after her waters have broken or when the baby travels down the birth canal.

The PREGNANCY & BIRTH Magazine GBS CAMPAIGN calls for:

- **EVERY pregnant woman in the UK to be warned of the dangers of GBS at her NHS antenatal appointments**
- **EVERY pregnant woman in the UK to be screened for GBS free on the NHS during their 35th to 37th week**
- **All health professionals to be fully educated about GBS and given proper guidelines for the treatment of it**

For further information and the arrangement of interviews with Sarah Hart, the Editor of Pregnancy & Birth Magazine, regarding this GBS study, please contact:

Susan de Vere on 023 8025 5245

Mother and baby CASE STUDIES available (these can be transmitted to you via e-mail)

Survey Sample:

1,000 pregnant women and new mothers, average age 29

57% 'married', 35% 'live with partner' and 8% 'single'

Nine out of 10 have 'never heard of Group B Strep' (87%) and of the few that have heard of it, TWO-THIRDS have 'no idea how dangerous this infection can be' (67%).

Most of the 13% who had heard about Group B Strep 'found out by chance' on the internet -

At present, NO test is given on the NHS and the only reliable test costs £32 privately. An overwhelming 92% of pregnant women surveyed say they would pay to have this test if they knew about it, although 40% of these say they 'can't really afford it' -

100% of survey respondents say they 'would have the test if it was available on the NHS'