

'Group B Strep testing cost-effective'

Testing pregnant women for Group B Streptococcal (GBS) infection would save lives and save the government £37 million a year, says new research.

The article in the *British Medical Journal* reports that most GBS infection in newborn babies could be prevented by testing all pregnant women and offering antibiotics during labour in cases where GBS is found.

This would be more cost-effective than current best practice, which involves intravenous antibiotics being offered routinely only to women who have previously had a baby with a GBS infection, who have incidentally tested positive for GBS during pregnancy or who have a fever in labour.

The research finds that the most cost-effective option that minimises antibiotic usage would be to treat all women in premature labour as well as all those at risk (where a mother has previously had a baby with a

Two private laboratories that offer reliable testing for GBS are offering £5 off the test during Group B Strep Awareness Week, which runs from 3-9 December.

Every year in the UK 700 newborn babies become infected with GBS and need treatment in special care baby units. Of these, 75 die and 40 are left with long-term mental and physical problems. Group B Strep Support says that more than 80 per cent of GBS infections in newborn babies could be prevented if routine, reliable testing for GBS were made available to all pregnant women on the NHS.

The charity is campaigning for every pregnant woman in the UK to be offered reliable testing for GBS on the NHS.

Chairman Jane Plumb said: "Mothers in the UK are being left in the dark about GBS and their babies put at risk. Testing for GBS is a routine part of antenatal care in many countries, including Canada, Australia, France, Italy and the USA, yet it's not even widely available on the NHS here. The British government and the NHS are letting young families down."

A campaign petition can be signed at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/groupbstrep>

Mothers wanting to claim the private GBS test discount can get more information from Group B Strep Support: www.gbss.org.uk, 0870 803 0023

GBS infection, has tested positive for GBS, or has a fever during labour). In addition, the researchers say that low-risk, full-term women should be tested, and those found to be carrying GBS should be treated. It also recommends immediate extension of current practice.

Jane Plumb, Chairman of medical charity Group B Strep Support, said: "It would be madness to ignore this crucial piece of research. It will save money. It will save babies' lives and it will save parents having to stand by as their baby suffers needlessly."

Colbourn T, Asseburg C, Bojke L et al (2007). 'Preventive strategies for group B streptococcal and other bacterial infections in early infancy: cost effectiveness and value of information analyses'. *BMJ*, 335 (7621): 655.

Breastfeeding receives boost

West Middlesex University Hospital has been awarded UNICEF Stage 1 Baby Friendly accreditation, only the second London hospital to do so.

Katie James, breastfeeding link midwife at the hospital, said their area of Richmond and Twickenham had the highest breastfeeding initiation rate in the country and this was testament to the hard work of all the staff involved.

"At West Middlesex we aim to ensure that all parents are helped to make an informed decision about feeding their babies and that they are then supported in their chosen feeding method. We do this by providing information about breastfeeding

both during pregnancy and after birth. New parents are also supported through one-to-one help and assistance and special breastfeeding clinics."

• Breastfeeding campaigners are celebrating a court ruling in the Philippines that they hope will prevent the aggressive marketing of formula milk.

The republic's Supreme Court has lifted a restraining order on new regulations for the marketing of baby foods which had been challenged by the formula industry body, the Pharmaceutical and Health Care Association of the Philippines (which includes Abbott Ross, Gerber, Mead

Johnson and Wyeth/SMA).

The Court rejected the industry's argument that the regulations were unconstitutional as a 'restraint of trade'.

The regulations, introduced by the Philippino Department of Health, now come into force and will require changes to product labels. An outright ban on formula advertising was rejected by the Court because this would need changes to the primary legislation.

Patti Rundall, Policy Director at Baby Milk Action, said: "Although this decision does not contain the crucial outright ban of advertising which all health advocates in the Philippines and around the world were calling for, it is still a significant victory and shows the importance of international campaigning."