**Group B strep awareness and babies**

Group B strep (GBS) is bacteria that some harbor in their bodies. GBS generally poses minimal health risks to adults who carry it, though it can present challenges to adults who are ill or older.

The most significant risk of GBS is to babies. Pregnant women can harbor GBS in their digestive tracts and birth canals, causing infections in the baby before and during childbirth.

The risks of GBS infection can be severe and even deadly. These risks include: miscarriage and stillbirth, blood infections (sepsis), meningitis, pneumonia and severe and permanent disabilities.

Fortunately, there are tests that can help doctors identify the presence of GBS in pregnant women. If a woman is a carrier, her doctor can take steps to protect the baby, such as prescribing antibiotics before and during childbirth. In the United States, women receive routine GBS screening at 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Even with testing, however, babies can suffer a GBS infection during and even after birth. Group B Strep International, an organization that educates the public about the risks of GBS, notes that infected babies can appear healthy, only to become very sick within a matter of hours. In these cases, getting prompt medical attention is critical: A delay can be deadly.

Some symptoms of early or late onset GBS infection in infants include: moaning, whimpering or a high-pitched crying, projectile vomiting and constant crying and irritability.

Contact your doctor as soon as possible if your infant develops any fever or you observe symptoms of GBS.

**Prayer:** Dear God, protect new mothers and their babies before, during and after birth. Bless them with the care needed to be healthy and strong. Amen.

**Support prenatal care in your congregation**

Prenatal care is an important part of ensuring that women are able to remain healthy during pregnancy and childbirth. Access to care during pregnancy also helps protect the health of babies.

During prenatal care, women receive comprehensive health care services that include:

- Evaluation and treatment for health problems that might make pregnancy or childbirth dangerous for the woman.
- Screening for conditions, such as group B strep, that might negatively impact the fetus.
- Education on nutrition and living a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy. If necessary, women can be referred to one or more public and private assistance programs that help women afford nutritious food.
- Preparation for childbirth, breastfeeding and motherhood.

Unfortunately, some women may have difficulty accessing prenatal care in their area. Faith communities can assist pregnant women with getting the prenatal care that they need in the following ways:

- Provide rides to doctor’s offices or clinics.
- Offer to care for a woman’s children during her appointments.
- Reach out to pregnant women and families with information about the importance of prenatal care.
- Help pregnant women locate and access appropriate health care, as well as assistance in paying for prenatal care.

Community support during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period can help ensure the health and well-being of families and their babies.

**Resources:** Advocatehealth.com • Group B Strep – groupbstrepiinternational.org • Meningitis – kidshealth.org/parent/infections/lung/meningitis.html

**Resources:** Advocatehealth.com • Prenatal Care Fact Sheet – womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/prenatal-care.html