



University of Michigan  
C.S. Mott Children's Hospital

# Vitamin K: Protecting Babies from Bleeding

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## **Why do we give all newborns a vitamin K shot after birth?**

All newborns - even healthy, full-term babies - are at risk for Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB). It is a bleeding problem that may occur during the first few months of life, most commonly in the baby's brain or intestines. VKDB can cause babies to die or have permanent brain damage. VKDB is a disease you can prevent by deciding to give your new baby vitamin K.

## **Is my baby at risk for bleeding?**

Yes. All babies are born with low levels of vitamin K, so all babies who do not receive the vitamin K shot at birth are at risk of bleeding until they are 6 months old.

- Vitamin K is an important part of the body's system for clotting, or stopping bleeding.
- There is not enough vitamin K passed from the mother during pregnancy or in breastmilk.
- Vitamin K is also made by normal bacteria in the gut in older children and adults, but babies do not yet have these bacteria.

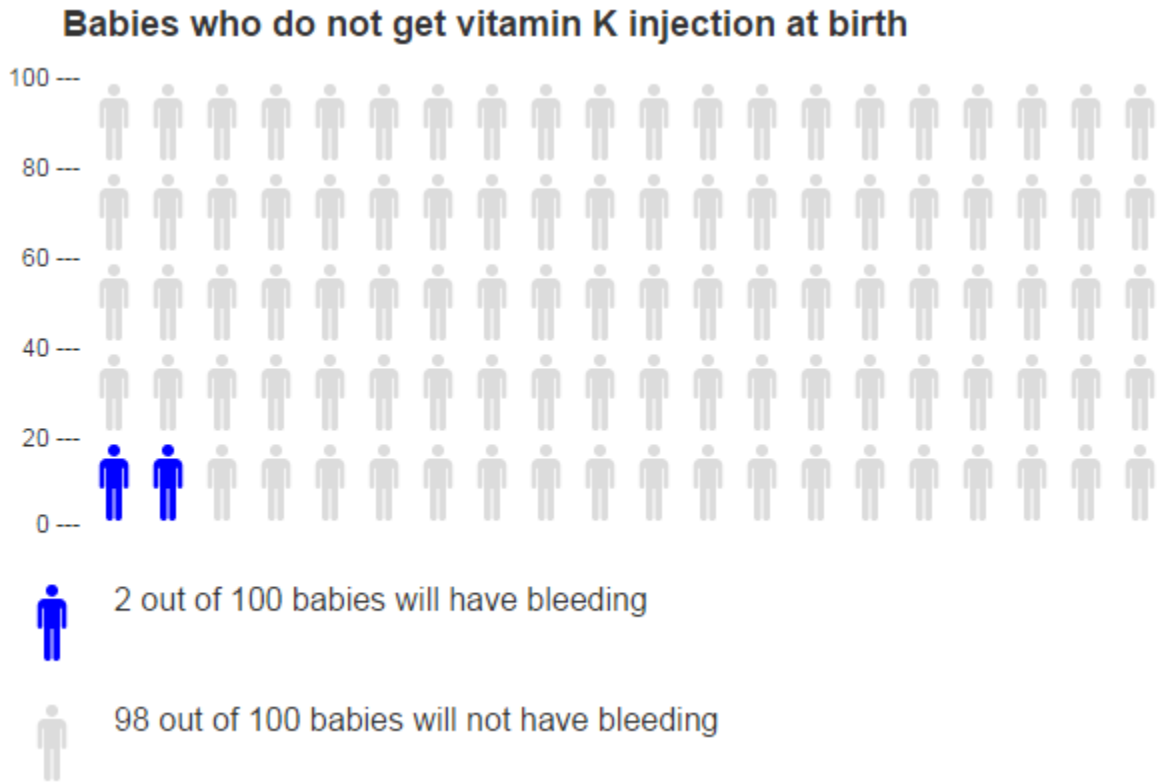
## **What happens when babies don't get the vitamin K shot at birth?**

Babies who don't get the vitamin K shot at birth can start bleeding all of a sudden, for no apparent reason, until they are 6 months old.

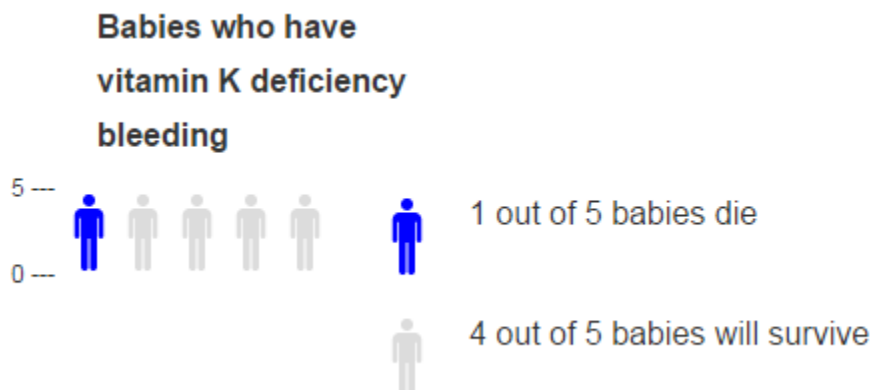
- Bleeding happens most often in the brain, the intestines, the umbilical cord, and the skin.
- The bleeding can be devastating. It can lead to permanent brain damage and death.

## What is the risk for my baby?

- 2 out of every 100 babies who do not get a vitamin K injection at birth will have vitamin K deficiency bleeding.



- 1 out of every 5 babies who have vitamin K deficiency bleeding die.



## **If we decide not to give vitamin K at birth and our baby develops bleeding, can we give him or her the vitamin K shot then?**

If a baby develops VKDB, they will receive vitamin K, but this cannot reverse some of the damage that may have been done already.

## **Can we give vitamin K by mouth (orally) instead of shot?**

Oral vitamin K does not prevent VKDB as well as an injection of vitamin K. Countries that started giving more oral vitamin K reported an increase in babies with VKDB. Therefore, this hospital and the American Academy of Pediatrics do not recommend oral vitamin K.

## **Who recommends vitamin K for newborns?**

All major groups of doctors and public health experts in the United States and around the world - including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the CDC, and the World Health Organization - recommend vitamin K injection at birth.

## **Are there any side effects of the vitamin K injection?**

- The vitamin K injection for newborns has been used for over 50 years. It is very safe.
- There are no significant side effects.

Your baby might feel mild pain when the shot is given - this passes quickly.

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