

# Vitamin K shots necessary to prevent internal bleeding in newborns

September 10 2015, by Tyler Greer

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The growing trend of parents' shunning vaccines has crept into another area that has physicians recommending caution—forgoing vitamin K shots in newborns.

Avoiding the shots, which are given to prevent internal bleeding in the

brain and intestines, can result in dire consequences for newborns, says DeeAnne Jackson, M.D., medical director of the UAB Hospital Newborn Nursery and associate professor in the School of Medicine.

"Newborns have been receiving vitamin K booster injections since 1961 to prevent [internal bleeding](#)," Jackson said. "These injections are necessary because babies have very low levels of vitamin K at birth, which can lead to serious bleeding problems if not supplemented. It is an essential nutrient babies need to assist the body in [blood clot formation](#)."

Some [parents](#) have recently begun saying no to vitamin K shots in what is believed by caregivers to be an extension of those who do not want their child to have any vaccines. Recent incidents in Tennessee and Ohio where children did not receive vitamin K shots have heightened awareness in caregivers to further explain to parents the need for the supplement.

In 2013, a Nashville hospital saw several cases of vitamin K deficiency bleeding in succession—incidents directly related to newborns' not receiving their vitamin K shot. In the seven cases of vitamin K deficiency encountered in an 8-month period, five of the infants had gastrointestinal or [brain bleeding](#), which can lead to permanent damage or even death.

When the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention further investigated, it found that [28 percent of parents with babies born at private birthing centers in Nashville had refused the shot](#).

# WHY VITAMIN K SHOTS

## ARE NECESSARY AND RECOMMENDED

**FACT:**

**SINCE 1961**, the American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended supplementing low levels of vitamin K in newborns with a **SINGLE SHOT** of vitamin K given at birth.



**Q** Can you wait a **FEW WEEKS** to see if your baby needs a vitamin K shot?

**A** No, waiting may be too late. The vitamin K shot is recommended within the **FIRST SIX HOURS** of life.



**FACT:**



All babies are born with very low levels of vitamin K because it does not cross the placenta well.

**Q** WHAT CAN HAPPEN if your newborn doesn't receive the shot?

**A** Babies can bleed into their intestines or brain where parents can't see it and know that something is wrong. This can delay medical care and lead to serious and life-threatening consequences.



**FACT:**



Breast milk alone is not enough to supplement the vitamin K needs.

**FACT:**



Newborns who do not get a vitamin K shot are **81 TIMES** more likely to develop severe bleeding than those who get the shot.



**Q** **OVERALL**, what are the risks of the shot?

**A** The same that are part of getting most any other shot — pain, slight bruising or swelling where the shot is given. No other risks have been proven by scientific studies.

— Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention

In a recent issue of the *Journal of Emergency Medicine*, doctors in Ohio documented a case where a 10-week-old was found to have experienced bleeding around the brain after parents refused both the vitamin K shot and the hepatitis B vaccine, also normally given to [newborns](#). The parents brought the child to the emergency room when the mother noticed flecks of blood in the baby's stool. Emergency physicians were able to stop the [bleeding](#) around the brain before it became severe with an infusion of vitamin K.

Jackson encourages parents who are concerned about vitamin K shots or any vaccines their children should receive after birth to talk to their physicians and pediatricians.

"I would encourage parents who may be nervous about vitamin K shots or vaccines to start these conversations prior to their baby's delivery so they can learn more about why these treatments are recommended ahead of time," Jackson said. "You really shouldn't wait to see if your baby needs a [vitamin](#) K shot after birth, because delaying medical care can lead to serious and life-threatening consequences."

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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