



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01505

Name of petitioner

Jackie Watt

Petition title

Awareness of Strep B in Pregnancy and Infants

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce new guidelines advising that all expectant mothers are given information about Strep B and are either screened for Strep B as a matter of routine or given information on where to go if they wish to be tested privately.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

I am campaigning for all pregnant women to be routinely tested for Strep B and to raise awareness of the dangers of contracting this infection.

This campaign is personal to me as I lost my Granddaughter recently, who died age 20 days from late-onset GBS. When this happened to our family we were completely devastated and were not aware of the dangers of GBS.

There are currently advertising campaigns in place warning us of the dangers of Meningitis and the signs and symptoms to look out for but there are none warning us of the risks of Strep B.

By starting this campaign I hope that we can raise awareness of GBS and for leaflets to be available at all at Health Centres etc warning us of the risks and to prevent it happening to anyone else.

A national tabloid published an article informing people of what happened to my Granddaughter and also the local newspapers published the article.

Margaret McDougall, MSP, contacted me personally with a view to raising the issue at the Scottish Parliament and I am starting an e-petition calling for all pregnant women to be tested for GBS. Countries like the USA, Canada, France, Germany and Spain that have introduced screening on a routine basis have seen a dramatic reduction in infections in the newborn.

If I can raise awareness and help prevent this happening to anyone else it may help to ease the heartbreaking devastation that our family have endured over the last few months.

Petition background information

What are the risks of GBS (group B streptococcus) infection during pregnancy?

Most pregnant women who carry GBS bacteria have healthy babies. However, there's a risk that GBS can pass to the baby during childbirth. GBS infection in newborn babies can cause serious complications that can be life threatening.

Carrying GBS during pregnancy is recognised as an important risk factor for GBS infection in a newborn baby, yet women are rarely told about group B Strep by their health professionals and even more rarely offered testing for it.

Most pregnant women who carry GBS bacteria have healthy babies. However, there's a small risk that GBS can pass to the baby during childbirth. Rarely, GBS infection in newborn babies can cause serious complications that can be life threatening.

Extremely rarely, GBS infection during pregnancy can also cause miscarriage, early (premature) labour or stillbirth.

What is GBS?

GBS is one of many bacteria that can be present in our bodies. It usually causes no harm. This situation is called "carrying" GBS or being colonised with GBS.

It's estimated that about one pregnant woman in five in the UK carries GBS in their digestive system or their vagina.

Around the time of labour and birth, many babies come into contact with GBS and are colonised by the bacteria. Most are unaffected but a small number can become infected.

Early-onset GBS infection

If a baby develops GBS infection less than seven days after birth, it's known as early-onset GBS infection. Most babies who become infected develop symptoms within 12 hours of birth. Symptoms include:

- being floppy and unresponsive
- not feeding well
- grunting
- high or low temperature
- fast or slow heart rates
- fast or slow breathing rates
- irritability

It's estimated that about 1 in 2,000 babies born in the UK and Ireland develops early-onset GBS infection. This means that every year in the UK (with 680,000 births a year) around 340 babies will develop early-onset GBS infection.

What complications can it cause?

Most babies who become infected can be treated successfully and will make a full recovery.

However, even with the best medical care, one in 10 babies diagnosed with early-onset GBS infection will die. The infection can cause life-threatening complications, such as:

- blood poisoning (septicaemia)
- infection of the lung (pneumonia)
- infection of the lining of the brain (meningitis)

Another one-in-five babies who survive the infection will be affected permanently. Early-onset GBS infection can cause problems such as cerebral palsy, deafness, blindness and serious learning difficulties.

Rarely, GBS can cause infection in the mother. For example, an infection in the womb or urinary tract, or more seriously, an infection that spreads through the blood, causing symptoms to develop throughout the whole body (sepsis).

Preventing early-onset GBS infection

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) has published guidance for healthcare professionals on preventing early-onset GBS infection. For more information, see [Is my baby at risk of early-onset GBS infection?](#)

If you have previously had a baby with GBS, your maternity team will either monitor the health of your newborn baby closely for at least 12 hours after birth, or treat them with penicillin until blood tests confirm whether or not GBS is present.

Late-onset GBS infection

Late-onset GBS infection develops seven or more days after a baby is born. This is not usually associated with pregnancy. The baby probably became infected after the birth. For example, they may have caught the infection in hospital from someone else.

GBS infections after three months of age are extremely rare.

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01505>

Related information for petition

Group B strep support group facebook

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

17 / 02 / 2014

Comments to stimulate online discussion

To raise awareness of Strep B which most pregnant woman have never heard of and are unaware of the potential risks to newborn babies should a mother be carrying this during labour. Also for mothers to be made aware of the symptoms of late onset Strep B, which can result in severe disabilities or death.