

Name of Child: _____ Date: _____

Jaundice in Newborn Babies

What is jaundice?

Babies with **jaundice** have yellow color of the skin and whites of the eyes. Jaundice is common in newborn babies, especially babies that are born early. The word jaundice comes from a French word that means yellow.

How can I tell if my baby has jaundice?

Jaundice may start to show when the baby is two to seven days old. The baby's face and eyes may start to turn yellow, then the yellow slowly spreads down to the chest, stomach, and legs.

Gently press your finger on the tip of your baby's nose or forehead. If you press and the skin looks yellow, ask your doctor to check your baby for jaundice. It is easier to see jaundiced in natural light or under fluorescent lights. The doctor may test a small sample of your baby's blood for the bilirubin level.

What causes jaundice?

Our body's cells are always being replaced with new ones. When old red blood cells break down, the red part of the cells (called **hemoglobin**) is changed to **bilirubin**. Everyone has a small amount of bilirubin in the blood. The liver turns this bilirubin into bile, and puts it into the intestine. The bile leaves the body in the stool. When there is too much bilirubin in the blood, it can make skin look yellow.

Babies are born with a lot of red blood cells, so there are a lot of cells to break down. A baby, especially a baby who is born early, may have a liver that is not yet mature. It may not work as well at birth as it will when the baby gets older. The baby does not have liver disease, but a liver that is too young to do its job. This is called **normal jaundice**. More than half of all babies get it and it may go away by itself within two weeks.

If the baby is born early, it may be called **jaundice of prematurity**. Jaundice may last longer in babies who are born early.

Other things can cause high bilirubin levels:

- the baby is bruised while being born
- the baby's mother has diabetes
- the baby's blood type is different from the mother's blood type
- the baby has a liver problem, like hepatitis
- the baby has an infection in the blood (**sepsis**)
- the baby has an enzyme deficiency
- the baby's body has more bilirubin than it can get rid of in the stool

How is jaundice treated?

The doctor or nurse practitioner will test to check the level of your baby's bilirubin. If the level is high, he or she will find out what is causing the jaundice.

Most jaundice is normal, harmless, and lasts only a few weeks. How serious the jaundice is depends on:

- your baby's age
- your baby's bilirubin level
- what is causing the high bilirubin level
- your baby's health and health problems

When the bilirubin level is 20 mg or above, it can hurt the baby. Some babies with very high bilirubin may become deaf, get cerebral palsy, or have brain damage.

The treatments for jaundice are safe and work well.

Treatments for bilirubin that is too high (called **hyperbilirubinemia**) include:

- **Breastfeed your baby about every 2 hours.**

The extra milk will cause more bowel movements, and help the baby get rid of the extra bilirubin in the stool.



**Breastfeed your baby
about every 2 hours.**

Sometimes babies with high bilirubin can be very sleepy. This can make breastfeeding harder since the baby might fall asleep when nursing. If you are breastfeeding and your baby is sleepy, try:

- changing your baby's diaper
- putting your baby to breast as soon as your baby shows signs of waking up
- gently rubbing your baby's hands
- gently tickling the bottom of your baby's feet

Ask to speak to a lactation consultant if you are not able to keep your baby awake enough to breastfeed or if your breasts become too full.

- **If your baby is formula fed**, your baby needs to have a bottle every 2-3 hours.
- **Light therapy, also called phototherapy.** Ordinary light changes the bilirubin that is just under the skin. It changes it to a form that the liver can get rid of more easily. So, the jaundice can get better faster if we put your baby under lights. Sunlight works, but babies with jaundice are often put under lamps called **bili lights**. Since these are just fluorescent lights, your baby will not get a sunburn or tan. These lights help break down the bilirubin faster.

This treatment may last several days. For this treatment:

- your baby's clothes are taken off
- your baby's eyes are covered, to protect them from the light
- your baby is kept warm
- your baby will be turned, so all parts of the baby's skin get into the light

Babies getting light treatments may have many loose, green stools. This is the extra bilirubin leaving the body.

Some babies sleep well under the lights. Other babies are fussy because they want to be wrapped in their blankets.

The baby's bilirubin level will be tested often, and when the level comes down to a safe level, the light treatments will end.

- **Sometimes babies may need intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG)** if the baby's blood type is different from the mother's blood type. This can help decrease the antibodies in the baby that are from the mother. This will decrease the bilirubin level in the baby.
- **Very rarely, babies may need a blood exchange transfusion.**



When to call your baby's doctor:

If your baby goes home soon after he or she is born, the jaundice may not show up in the hospital. So, in that first week, check your baby in good light, to see if his or her skin is turning yellow.

Call your baby's doctor right away if:

- your baby's skin or eyes are yellow
- your baby's temperature is over 100.4° F (38.0° C)
- your baby's skin gets darker after 7 days
- your baby looks or acts sick
- your baby is not gaining weight
- you have any questions or concerns about your baby

Now that you've read this:

- Tell your nurse or doctor how we treat jaundice. (Check when done).
- Tell your nurse or doctor when you would call the doctor. (Check when done).



If you have any questions or concerns,

- call your child's doctor or
- call _____

If you want to know more about child health and illness,
visit our library at The Emily Center at Phoenix Children's Hospital
1919 East Thomas Road
Phoenix, AZ 85016
602-933-1400
866-933-6459
www.phoenixchildrens.org
Facebook: facebook.com/theemilycenter
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Name of Health Care Provider: _____

Date returned: _____ db

Family Review of Handout

Health care providers: Please teach families with this handout.

Families: Please let us know what you think of this handout.

Would you say this handout is hard to read? Yes No

easy to read? Yes No

Please circle the parts of the handout that were hard to understand.

Would you say this handout is interesting to read? Yes No

Why or why not?

Would you do anything differently after reading
this handout? Yes No

If yes, what?

After reading this handout, do you have any
questions about the subject? Yes No

If yes, what?

Is there anything you don't like about the drawings?

Yes

No

If yes, what?

What changes would you make in this handout to make it better or easier to understand?

Please return your review of this handout to your nurse or doctor or send it to the address below.

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1919 East Thomas Road
Phoenix, AZ 85016-7710

602-933-1395

Thank you for helping us!