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TAKE PRECAUTIONS TO AVOID PASSING GROUP B STREP TO YOUR BABY

MORGANTOWN, WV — (FEBRUARY 5, 2018)

Approximately 1 in 4 pregnant women are positive for Group B Streptococcus (GBS) or Streptococcus Agalactiae, which is the leading cause of meningitis and sepsis in newborns. Found naturally in the digestive tracts of both men and women, GBS can have serious effects on infants who become infected.

More than 12,000 babies are infected each year within their first six months. GBS can cause babies who become infected in the womb to be miscarried, stillborn or even become extremely sick after birth, which can also lead to death.

February is International Prenatal Infection Month and the Monongalia County Health Department’s Women, Infants, & Children (WIC) program wants to educate women on taking appropriate measures to identify and prevent possible illness and birth defects by getting tested early for GBS.

Babies who survive can still experience handicaps such as blindness, deafness, mental challenges and cerebral palsy.

GBS is not considered a sexually transmitted disease or infection but it can be passed through sexual partners, including through oral contact.

Because GBS is found in the digestive tract, it could possibly present itself as a bladder infection or vaginitis. A urine sample can be taken to test for the bacteria and determine if the symptoms are due to GBS or something else. A swab of the rectum and vagina can be taken as well and sent to a laboratory to test for the bacteria. Blood and spinal fluid can also be tested if a doctor believes their patient may be positive.
It is important to note that GBS doesn’t always cause symptoms; therefore, pregnant women should get tested between the 35th and 37th weeks of pregnancy.

If test results come back positive, the most common treatment is penicillin, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov), as it is safe for the baby. However, if the mother is allergic to penicillin, other medications can be substituted to treat GBS.

Because the bacteria can grow back rapidly, the CDC notes, women who test positive for Group B Strep will also receive an IV of antibiotics during labor. According to the CDC, receiving treatment during labor decreases babies’ risk of infection from .5 percent to .02 percent.

Once babies are born, they are still at risk of catching meningitis, sepsis or pneumonia because of GBS. A list of specific symptoms to watch out for can be found at https://goo.gl/WJDxez.

For more information about GBS, two websites offer additional information: cdc.gov/groupbstrep/ as well as groupbstrepinternational.org.

To contact WIC for more information or to make an appointment, call 304-598-5181 or visit monchd.org/wic.