



Newborn Jaundice

Newborn jaundice is common. Most jaundice in healthy babies is not serious and does not need treatment.

Jaundice happens when babies' skin and whites of the eyes appear yellow. This is from the normal breakdown of red blood cells in the baby's body. When red blood cells break down, a yellow substance called bilirubin is formed. Babies get rid of bilirubin through their stools. Low levels of jaundice are not harmful but can make a baby sleepy. Extremely high levels of jaundice can cause brain damage or hearing loss. This is very rare.

Jaundice may be more serious if

- baby is not feeding well
- baby is premature
- baby has bruises from birth
- baby has different blood type than mother
- a brother or sister had jaundice

Jaundice is seen first in the face and spreads down the body towards the feet. Low levels of jaundice are seen only in the face and chest. Skin appears yellow in the abdomen, legs and lower arms when the jaundice level is higher.

Your baby's skin colour alone will not tell you how serious the jaundice is. Jaundice can be checked using a blood test. Holding your baby and breastfeeding during the test can help your baby to feel more relaxed.

Your baby may have had a bilirubin level test done in the hospital. Even if the test was normal, your baby's jaundice can increase after you go home.

To check your baby for jaundice

- hold your baby in natural light, for example near a window
- look to see if the white part of your baby's eyes looks yellow
- gently press your fingertip on your baby's forehead, nose, chest, arms and legs. If these areas look yellow or orange when you pull your finger away then there is jaundice

What to do

Make sure baby is feeding well.

- feed your baby often, at least every 3 hours. You may need to wake your baby to feed
- watch for strong, slow, steady sucking
- listen for swallowing

If your baby is sleepy during feeds:

- unwrap baby and feed skin to skin
- use breast compression. Gently squeeze your breast while baby is feeding
- offer both breasts at each feed
- burp baby or change the diaper between breasts
- gently stroke the baby's back or feet
- offer extra breastmilk if your baby is not feeding well

Call your health care provider if

- refuses breastfeeding or bottle feeding,
- is sleepy all the time,
- has lost a lot of weight (more than 10% of her weight at birth),
- is extremely jaundiced (arms and legs are a yellow or orange colour), or
- jaundice that seems to be getting worse.

How is jaundice treated?

Continue breastfeeding if your baby is jaundiced. Your baby will be more awake for feeding as jaundice decreases. If you need help contact a public health nurse.

Babies with high levels of jaundice may need to be placed under special lights called phototherapy. This may be done in the hospital or with special equipment at home.

Putting your baby in sunlight is not safe or effective. Newborns should never be placed in direct sunlight in window or outdoors.

**Vancouver Coastal Health is committed to helping women successfully breastfeed.
Please call your local Public Health Unit for additional information.**

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**Other information on parenting are available
at your local Community Health Office/Centre
or online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca>**

You can get further information about breastfeeding from:

Public Health Nurse or Community Dietitian
at Vancouver Coastal Health www.vch.ca
Baby's Best Chance www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting
VCH Parenting Website <http://parenting.vch.ca/>
HealthLinkBC 8-1-1
Translation services are available in 130 languages www.healthlinkbc.ca

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