

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Positive Coombs test



Your baby has had a positive Coombs test. This leaflet explains what this means and gives important information regarding the care of your baby.

What is the Coombs test?

This is a blood test we commonly perform on babies (or sometimes on blood taken from the umbilical cord) when we suspect there may be a potential reaction between the blood types of a mother and her baby or when a baby becomes jaundiced. A positive test shows that there is a reaction between the blood group of a baby and his/her mother which can sometimes lead to a baby requiring careful monitoring and treatment.

What problems can happen when my baby has a positive Coombs test?

When a baby has a positive Coombs test, the reaction between mother and baby's blood can lead to **jaundice** and **anaemia**. Many babies will not have either of these problems, but it is very important to be aware of them, to check for them and to follow the treatment plan made by the doctor looking after your baby.

What is jaundice?

Jaundice is when the build-up of a pigment called bilirubin causes the skin to appear yellow. A mild degree of jaundice is seen in many babies during the first week or two as part of the biological processes that occur during birth and early life. However, when a baby has a positive Coombs test, the jaundice level can become dangerously high if it is not recognised and treated.

What is anaemia?

Anaemia is when there are fewer red blood cells than normal. This can happen in babies with a positive Coombs test because the reaction between mother and baby's blood can lead to the breakdown of red blood cells. This process can continue for up to 3 months.

What next?

Your baby will be examined by a doctor. Blood tests will be taken to monitor the jaundice level of your baby accurately. There will then be one of two outcomes. The doctor looking after your baby will tell you which of the two outcomes apply to your baby:

- **Outcome 1 – your baby did not require treatment for jaundice**

No follow up is necessary but there is still a small chance that your baby may have problems such as worsening jaundice or anaemia.

You need to continue to monitor your baby (see 'What problems should I look out for?' below) and if you are concerned then speak with your midwife or GP.

• **Outcome 2 – your baby required treatment for jaundice**

Your baby will be started on a medicine called folic acid. This is a natural vitamin that is required by the body to make new red blood cells. This medicine will help your baby to avoid becoming anaemic. You should continue this medicine until told to stop by the paediatric doctor at follow up in the hospital. You may need to get extra supplies of this medicine, and this should be arranged in good time by talking to your GP.

Further blood tests will be required on your baby in 1-2 weeks. The doctor looking after your baby will arrange these and give you a time, date and location. Additional blood tests may also be needed, dependent on test results. It is very important you attend the hospital for these tests so that the number of red blood cells in your baby's blood can be accurately measured.

You need to continue to monitor your baby (see 'What problems should I look out for?' below) and if you are concerned then speak with your midwife or GP.

What problems should I look out for?

The problems that can occur in babies with a positive Coombs test will happen in the first 3 months of life. After this there should be no long term problems for your baby.

It is possible that jaundice and anaemia can develop and/or become worse when your baby has gone home. For this reason, it is important to continue to monitor your baby. The following is a list of concerning symptoms that should prompt you to seek help from your GP or midwife:

- Increasing jaundice (yellow colour to the skin).
- Increasingly pale skin.
- Poor feeding.
- Breathing fast or seeming to have difficulty with their breathing.
- Excessive sleepiness.

Where can I get further advice?

If you are worried or need advice you can speak with:

- Your GP.
- An out of hours GP.
- Your midwife or health visitor.
- NHS 111.
- **In an emergency, always call 999.**

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet (if relevant) please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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