

## Fact Sheet

### Jaundice in newborns.

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#### What is Jaundice?

- Jaundice is a yellow colour of the skin and whites of the eyes. It is caused by a high level of bilirubin in the blood.
- Around 60% of term and 80% of preterm babies develop jaundice within the first week of life.

#### What causes jaundice?

- There are many different reasons that babies get jaundice. A few uncommon causes are serious and require specialist management by the medical team.
- Before birth, babies need more red blood cells to carry oxygen around their body. After birth, they no longer need this large supply of red cells, because their lungs now bring oxygen into their bloodstream.
- The unwanted red blood cells break down to produce bilirubin. This is a waste material which goes to the liver. The body then removes it in the urine and poo.
- An excess build-up of bilirubin in the blood can cause yellow skin and eye colour. This can take a bit of time to resolve.
- **Breastfeeding jaundice** - occurs when your baby is dehydrated, if not breastfeeding well or not often enough. The jaundice often improves when baby is feeding well and getting more fluids.
- Some uncommon diseases like Rhesus disease can cause severe jaundice as the red blood cells are destroyed very quickly. This needs **urgent medical treatment**.

- **Breast milk Jaundice** - is when there is substance in the mother's breastmilk which interferes with the baby's ability to get rid of bilirubin. This type of jaundice often happens a few days after birth and isn't harmful.
- Breastmilk jaundice is diagnosed after all other causes are checked and usually resolves after several weeks.

#### Is jaundice harmful to my baby?

- For most babies, jaundice is not harmful. It usually disappears towards the end of the first week of life.
- In most cases your baby will not need treatment or blood tests for Jaundice.
- Severe jaundice, if not treated can cause brain damage or other long term health complications.

#### Tests

- Looking at your baby's skin colour is not always an accurate way to measure the level of jaundice.
- Staff caring for your baby will observe your baby's skin and use a small monitor which presses against the skin on the chest.
- When the monitor reading is high, the staff will collect a blood sample. The blood test is the accurate way of reading the level of bilirubin in the blood.

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## Treatment

- Phototherapy is treatment used for jaundice. A bright blue light shines on baby's bare skin. Your baby will only wear a nappy and eye shield during phototherapy.
- The treatment changes the bilirubin into a substance which dissolves easily in water. The body gets rid of it the same way.
- You will be encouraged to feed your baby often which helps jaundice to improve.
- Blood tests to check the bilirubin level will be carried out daily - or more often if needed.
- Phototherapy treatment will stop as soon as baby's bilirubin level is normal.
- In severe cases of jaundice, the baby may need to have a special blood transfusion. This treatment will occur in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) under the guidance of the baby's medical team.



## Follow up

- Usually **no** long term problems occur following jaundice. However babies who have had high levels of jaundice should have a hearing check around 9 months of age.
- **Prolonged jaundice** - Babies who are having extended jaundice treatment will require further investigations. This is to rule out other illnesses like urinary tract infections, thyroid or liver problems.
- Ongoing checks will occur around:
  - 2 weeks old if born before 37 weeks or
  - 3 weeks old if born after 37 weeks.
- Your baby's care may be transferred to the Newborn and Parent Support Team (NAPS), paediatrician or GP for further investigations, depending on your local hospital.

Please scan the QR code below to see instruction video on '**how to care for your baby being treated for jaundice at home with the Bilisoft equipment**'.



We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way on continually improving our service.

Send your feedback to:

wsldh-wmdwnhwebsite@health.nsw.gov.au

