



**Royal Berkshire**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Neonatal (newborn babies) BCG vaccination

Information for parents/carers

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This leaflet is for the parents and carers of newborn babies who will be offered the BCG vaccination at, or soon after, birth. Bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) was developed by Calmette and Guérin at the Pasteur Institute (Lille), and contains a weakened form of the bacteria (germs) that cause tuberculosis (TB). It does not cause TB, but helps your baby develop protection (immunity) against the disease should he/she ever come into contact with it.

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### What is TB and how is it caught?

TB is a serious infectious disease that can lead to TB meningitis (swelling of the lining of the brain) in babies and young children. In young people and adults, TB common affects the lungs but can occur in almost any part of the body. Only TB of the lungs or throat can be passed on to others and it usually takes close, lengthy contact with someone who is coughing the germs for the disease to spread.

**TB is curable with a course of special antibiotics.**

### Are there reasons he/she should not have the BCG?

The vaccine should not be given (or should be delayed) if your baby has a high fever (temperature); is having treatment/has a condition that weakens the immune system; there is a history of parental HIV infection; has a skin condition on the left upper arm (site where BCG is given).

The vaccine should be delayed until the infant is 6 months old if the baby's mother was taking biological medicines (TNF $\alpha$  antagonists) during pregnancy, as this can cause the baby to suffer from a BCG infection.

## Why is my baby being offered the BCG?

In the UK, the BCG is offered to babies who are more likely than the general population to come into close contact with someone who has TB. That is babies whose parents or grandparents come from a country with high rates of TB.

## Care of the BCG vaccination site

- The vaccine injected into the outer skin layer makes a tiny white 'bleb', which must be left alone. This will disappear within about half an hour. In most cases, although not all, the BCG causes a reaction at the injection site, usually between 2-8 weeks following the vaccination.

A small red lump, often containing pus, with scaling and blistering of the site, occurs frequently. It is quite normal for the area to weep a little. This will crust over after some time and a scab will then form.

- Do not pick, knock, scratch or wash the site or scab. It will make it sore and it will take much longer to heal and could get infected and cause a worse scar.
- It is important to keep the BCG vaccination site dry and let the air get to it as much as possible. Do not cover it, wear light clothing if needed, but avoid tight and itchy clothes such as woollen jumpers.
- Do not keep getting the area wet and certainly not soggy. If you take baby swimming, cover the site with a waterproof plaster; take the plaster off as soon as possible, pat the skin dry and let the air get at it again. For a bath or shower, do not cover the area but be careful not to rub it at all. Again, pat it dry afterwards and let the air get to it.
- With care, the BCG vaccination site should not cause any problems. After about 6-8 weeks, sometimes longer, the scab should come off on its own and leave a small red mark which will fade slowly over time and eventually leave a small scar.

### Possible side effects:

Severe allergic reactions (redness/swelling of the face, neck or throat; skin rash; breathing difficulties) may occur in rare cases. Contact the midwife immediately if your baby develops any of these shortly after the vaccine has been given.

### Uncommon side effects: (may be less than 1 in 100 cases)

Fever; swelling of lymph nodes in the armpit larger than 1cm across; an oozing ulcer at the injection site larger than 1cm across.

### Rare side effects: (may occur in less than 1 in 1,000 cases)

Inflammation of lymph nodes, sometimes with oozing ulcers, possibly abscess; infection with the vaccine bacteria which can spread throughout the body.

Some side effects will require treatment.

### Further advice:

Your baby can start their routine immunisations regardless of whether they have had the BCG, but you must make sure that no other injections are given in the left arm for at least 3 months.

Please make sure the vaccine is documented in your baby's red Personal Child Health Record.

If you are experiencing problems with the BCG vaccine site, or are concerned, please ring the TB Nurses on Tel: 0118 322 8266 or 0118 322 6882.

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West Berkshire TB Service, Department of Respiratory Medicine, November 2011.  
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