

Neonatal Department- Adan Hospital

Baby Friendly Initiative Hospital

Neonatal Jaundice

Information for Parents

Most newborn babies have jaundice. If your baby has jaundice, their skin will look slightly yellow or suntanned. Sometimes the whites of the eyes or the inside of the mouth or gums will also look yellow. If your baby has dark skin, the main sign may be a yellowing in the whites of their eyes or inside their mouth.

For most babies jaundice is harmless and nothing for you to worry about. But if you think that your baby has jaundice, it is always best to seek medical advice.

Jaundice is caused by too much 'bilirubin' in the blood. Bilirubin is a chemical in the body that is normally passed out of the body in urine (wee) and stool (poo).

How should I check if my baby has jaundice?

It is important that you check your baby for jaundice, particularly during the first week of life. Check if your baby's skin looks yellow. The yellow color usually starts on the face and forehead and then spreads to the body, arms and legs.

Check if the whites of your baby's eyes look yellow.

Check if the gums or roof of your baby's mouth looks yellow. The best time to do this is when your baby is crying and their mouth is open wide.

From time-to-time, gently press your baby's skin to see if you can see a yellow tinge.

A good time to check your baby is when you are changing their nappy or clothes. Try to check in bright and preferably natural light. Ask the nurse before you leave the hospital to show you how to check your baby for jaundice, if you are not sure.

How will I know if my baby has jaundice?

To confirm whether your baby has jaundice, the doctor will ask blood test to do by a heel prick to measure the amount of bilirubin in your baby's blood. This also can be done by using a small hand held device that does not puncture the skin and is placed on your baby's forehead or chest. We may need to do this test again 6 to 12 hours later.

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What treatment will my baby be given?

1. Mild jaundice does not normally need any treatment, but your doctor or lactation consultant nurse will need to give you extra advice and support with breastfeeding to make sure that your baby is feeding adequately and correctly
2. If the level of bilirubin in your baby's blood is high, they may need to go into hospital to get treatment. Your baby may be given light treatment known as 'phototherapy'. Your baby will be placed under a lamp that shines a special type of light onto the skin. This light helps to break down the bilirubin, which will then be passed out of your baby's body in their urine and stools. Your baby will be placed under the light naked, apart from a nappy. This is to make sure that the light shines on as much of your baby's skin as possible. Eye pads will be placed over your baby's eyes to protect them. The blood test to measure the amount of bilirubin in your baby's blood has to be repeated every 6 hours. You will be encouraged to take your baby out from under the lamp for short breaks for feeds, nappy changes and cuddles.
3. If your baby's bilirubin level is very high, more than one lamp will be used at the same time and your baby will need to stay under the lamps without breaks.

You can usually continue to breastfeed your baby during phototherapy.

4. Babies with extremely high bilirubin levels may need to be treated in an intensive care unit. These babies may need an 'exchange transfusion' which involves replacing the baby's blood with new blood from a donor.

Your doctor will discuss all treatment options with you and answer any questions that you have.

Does jaundice cause any long-term problems?

For most babies, jaundice does not cause any long-term problems. Very rarely, the amount of bilirubin in a baby's blood is so high that it does cause long-term problems such as hearing loss or cerebral palsy. But you should remember that this is extremely rare and that with the right treatment this small risk is reduced even further.

What should I do if my baby's jaundice does not clear up?

For most babies, jaundice clears up within a few days. If your baby has jaundice for more than 2 weeks (or for more than 3 weeks for babies that were born premature), make sure that you tell your midwife or doctor. Your baby may need further tests to check for other medical problems.

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