

# Jaundice and the Newborn Baby

## Information for parents and carers

---

### What is jaundice?

In the first few days after birth, you may notice your newborn baby's skin has a yellow colour.

This is called 'jaundice'. Jaundice often develops in normal health babies in the first week or so of life. Jaundice is caused by high levels of a chemical called 'bilirubin' in your baby's body.

In most babies it is a normal event and not serious. It will nearly always disappear gradually over a few days without treatment.

- Some babies who have a lot of bruising when they are born may develop a higher bilirubin level.
- Some breastfed babies (about 5%) will have a mild jaundice which can last a few weeks. This is called 'breast-milk' jaundice. Breastfeeding should continue as it is the best food for your baby.

### Why can jaundice be harmful to my baby?

- Babies with a moderate level of bilirubin may be more sleepy than usual and may not feed well.
- Encouraging your baby to feed more often is usually enough to keep their bilirubin levels down.
- If untreated, extremely high levels of bilirubin can damage parts of the brain, including the parts that affect hearing, vision, and control of movement.

### Signs of jaundice.

Many babies are sent home in the first 2 days of life, so parents need to watch their baby for signs of jaundice.

If you have been discharged and your baby

- Looks yellow and is less than 48 hours of age.
- Is rapidly becoming more yellow.
- Is yellow on the tummy, arms or legs and becoming sleepy.

**Take your baby to the Emergency Department at your nearest hospital.**

### Treatment for neonatal jaundice.

- Babies who are well and are mildly jaundiced require frequent feeding.
- If the bilirubin level is high, phototherapy (light therapy) may be used.
- The light changes the bilirubin so it can then be passed out of the baby's body.
- Phototherapy is safe and effective.
- Your baby will be admitted to hospital for treatment.
- You will be able to still care for your baby as much as possible.

### The care will include:

- Being placed in a warm covered cot.
- Having an eye protector placed over your baby's eyes.
- Being nursed naked with just a nappy on so maximum light can fall onto the skin.
- Having feeds more often
- Having blood tests to see if your baby still needs phototherapy.