
WHAT'S IN A KISS? BE INFORMED OF THE RISK

WHAT'S IN A KISS?
RAISING AWARENESS OF **NEONATAL HERPES** IN NEWBORNS



WHAT IS NEONATAL HERPES?

Neonatal herpes is a herpes infection in a newborn baby. It is caused by herpes simplex, a highly contagious virus that can cause cold sores and genital lesions in adults.

Although the virus is common, neonatal herpes is very rare, however, it is a potentially serious condition if not diagnosed quickly. Being aware and recognising the symptoms could save your baby's life.

HOW DOES A BABY GET NEONATAL HERPES?

A baby is most at risk to the virus within the first 6 weeks of life due to a lack of immunity. The most common ways a baby can get the virus are:

- After birth, if a person with a cold sore has physical contact, such as kissing a new-born near their eyes, nose, ears, mouth or near any breaks in a baby's skin
- When an intervention instrument has been used, such as forceps or a ventouse, causing breaks in the skin on the baby's head or face which make it easier for the virus to enter the body if a person with a cold sore kisses the baby's head or face.
- Acquiring it at birth, usually when a mother with no previous history of Herpes, develops the virus for the first time in the last trimester of pregnancy. Often the mother will not show any symptoms and the infection can be passed through the birth canal onto the baby
- When a mother with an existing Herpes infection, touches her cold sore and then her breast, when feeding a baby

SYMPTOMS

Neonatal Herpes is hard to detect and often confused with other sepsis related illnesses. Symptoms can vary from case to case. If a baby shows any or all the following symptoms, seek medical advice urgently:



Skin looks mottled, pale or jaundice



Extremely lethargic



Floppy



Abnormally quiet or sleepy



Shows a lack of response to noise or pain



Has a wheeze or breathing distress / irregular breathing patterns



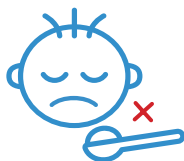
Eyes or soft spot on the top of baby's head is swollen



Has a convulsion or fit



Low temperature below 36



Is not interested in feeding



Fever



Appears to be deteriorating, even after medication

I ALREADY HAVE HERPES, IS MY BABY AT RISK?

Mothers with a history of the virus are at very low risk of passing the infection on to their baby. This is because maternal antibodies are passed through the placenta and provide protection.

It is unlikely that a baby will catch the infection from their mother during birth if she does have a history of the illness, however as a precaution you can seek advice about taking antiviral medication in the weeks prior to delivery to prevent an outbreak. If you do have an outbreak in the last trimester of your pregnancy or around the time of your birth, a caesarean section may be advised.

If your partner has genital herpes or facial cold sores and you do not, it is important that you do not become infected just before giving birth as this is dangerous for your baby. If you experience your first genital herpes symptoms at this time, a caesarean section may be advised.



HOW SERIOUS IS HERPES FOR A BABY?

In some cases, the virus will only affect the baby's eyes, mouth or skin and there will be visible signs on the baby's skin that alert you to the virus. Usually, this can be treated with antiviral treatment and the baby will make a good recovery. However, in cases where there are no obvious rashes or symptoms, the virus can become more serious and can spread to a baby's organs, which can lead to severe brain damage or death. If your baby is abnormally quiet and shows a lack of response to pain (such as injections or heel prick tests) and does not seem startled by loud noises, take them to A&E immediately.

HOW TO PREVENT A BABY CONTRACTING THE VIRUS

- If you have a history of genital herpes and you have an active outbreak of vaginal blisters near the time of the birth, do not worry, your baby will likely have antibody protection, however a caesarean section may be recommended or antiviral treatment maybe given once the baby is delivered as a precaution
- If you go into labour early – around 7 months or before – and you have a genital outbreak at the time, tell your doctor or midwife. A caesarean section should be carried out, as your baby will not yet have received antibodies from you and could be at risk from a vaginal delivery
- Avoid kissing your baby if you have a cold sore and do not breastfeed if you have any lesions on your breasts
- Friends or family should not kiss the baby if they have any visible cold sores
- Use protection (a condom) when having sexual intercourse in the last trimester of your pregnancy to reduce risk of infection
- Advise caregivers to wear a surgical mask if they have any visible cold sores until any lesions have crusted and dried
- Wash your hands anytime you hold or touch a baby
- Avoid putting dummies or bottles which are used by the baby, into your mouth. Keep toys and teething items clean

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IF YOU HAVE A RECENTLY DEVELOPED OR REACTIVATED HERPES INFECTION OR COLD SORE, TAKE THESE PREVENTATIVE MEASURES TO AVOID INFECTING A BABY:

- Do not kiss a baby
- Wash your hands before/anytime you hold or touch a baby
- Avoid putting dummies or bottles which are used by the baby, into your mouth. Keep toys and teething items clean



THE TRICK IS TO BE QUICK

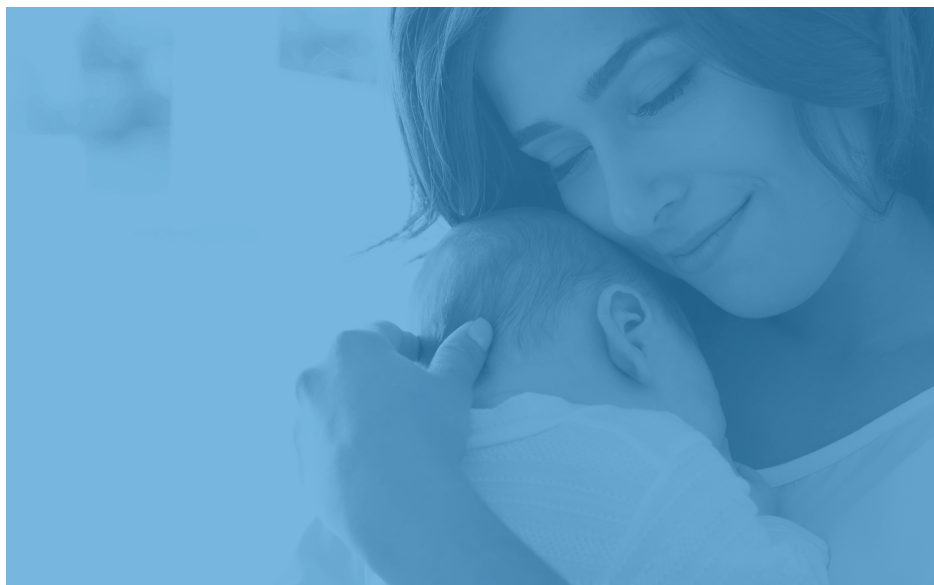
Early detection of the virus increases the possibility of a good outcome for the baby and is the only real prevention a baby has from the virus. What's in a kiss? Be informed of the risk.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF A BABY HAS THE VIRUS?

Neonatal Herpes is hard to detect and often confused with other Sepsis related illnesses. Symptoms can vary from case to case, which is why it is so important to monitor your baby closely. Check your baby's symptoms using the Symptoms section of this leaflet (page 3). Pay particular attention if your baby has:

- A lack of response to pain
- Does not cry
- Is not easily roused from sleep
- Does not wake up for long periods of time or naturally for nappy changes or feeds
- Their condition worsens, even after being given antibiotics

As Neonatal Herpes Simplex is so rare, it may be missed in the early stages by medical professionals who may not have had previous exposure to the illness. Ask medical professionals who are treating a newborn with these signs to consider Neonatal HSV as it could save a baby's life.



SUPPORT AND ADVICE

For more information or support visit:

www.whatsinakiss.com
www.nhs.uk/conditions/neonatal-herpes/
www.herpess.org.uk
www.sands.com
www.bliss.com
[#whatsinakiss](https://twitter.com/whatsinakiss)

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