

Infants can get infections easily because their ability to fight infections is not well developed. The younger infants are, the more likely they can get an infection. Infants are tested and treated for infection because:

- Infection is a common problem in this age group.
- They can get sick very fast.

If an infection is found and treated early, infants respond very quickly to treatment and do very well.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of an Infection in an Infant?

Your infant may have one or some of these signs or symptoms:

- Fever, a rectal temperature greater than or equal to 38.0 degrees Celsius or 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit
- Low body temperature
- Feeding poorly
- Very sleepy and not waking for feedings
- Irritable and not settling down after feedings
- Breathing faster than normal (over 60 breaths per minute)
- Not acting right, or have a change in behaviour
- Pale or grayish skin

- Bluish colour around the lips and mouth
- Jaundice (skin is a yellowish colour)

How Do We Test for an Infection in an Infant?

1. Blood tests: the nurse will take a blood sample from your infant (and may start an intravenous at the same time)
2. Urine test: the nurse will collect a urine sample from your infant.
3. The doctor will do an examination of your infant and may decide to order some tests such as:
 - Spinal tap
 - Chest x-ray
 - Nasal suction (a sample of secretions from the nose)

How Is the Infection Treated?

The doctor will discuss a plan of care with you. Here are some of the treatment options that may be discussed.

- Bacterial infections can be treated effectively with antibiotics. Your baby will receive the antibiotics through the intravenous.
- If your baby has a fever he/she will be treated with acetaminophen

- (Tylenol®, Tempra® or Abenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®).
- As test results become available, decisions will be made about the need for hospitalization.

Encourage your baby to feed as usual unless you are told otherwise. If you have any other questions or concerns, please speak with a nurse or doctor.

More Information About the Tests

Blood tests:

- Complete Blood Count (counts the different types of cells in the blood).
- Blood Culture (a test to see if bacteria is in the blood). It may take up to 48 hours for a result to come back.
- Glucose (measures the sugar level in baby's blood to make sure it is within normal range).

Urine Test:

- Using a technique called catheterization; a tiny tube is inserted into the baby's urethra and into the bladder. The urine flows out into a sterile container.

Spinal Tap:

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid surrounding the brain. It is diagnosed by doing a test called a spinal tap (or lumbar puncture) to get a sample of the spinal fluid for testing.

- To collect the sample, a hollow needle is inserted carefully through the space between the vertebrae in the lower part of the spine.
- The baby will cry during the test, but it is no more painful than drawing a blood sample.
- The time to prepare and do the procedure takes about 30 minutes or less.

*Adapted, with permission, from the
Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario*

*Developed by the health care professionals
of the Emergency Department with
assistance from the Department of
Learning & Development*

PE#390 © C&W July 2005

Fever in Infants: Emergency Care



An agency of the Provincial
Health Services Authority

4480 Oak Street, Vancouver BC V6H 3V4
604-875-2345