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## **NEWBORN JAUNDICE**

### **What is jaundice?**

Jaundice is a buildup of bilirubin that causes the skin and whites of the eyes to appear yellow. Bilirubin is produced during the body's normal breakdown of red blood cells and is removed from the body in feces. Jaundice appears when bilirubin builds up faster than it can be processed and removed. It is not a disease and is not contagious.

### **What causes jaundice?**

Physiologic (normal) jaundice occurs because normal babies produce about twice as much bilirubin as adults and break it down more slowly. It is usually noticed between 2-4 days of age and disappears within 1-2 weeks.

Breast-feeding jaundice can occur when a baby is not drinking enough breast milk and usually starts in the first week of life. It usually improves once the mother's milk comes in and the baby is feeding better. Breast-milk jaundice can occur because of a substance produced in breast milk. It may start around one week of age and can last several weeks to a few months. The bilirubin level typically is not as high, but remains elevated enough to cause a slightly yellow appearance of the skin.

Blood group incompatibility occurs when a mother produces antibodies that can destroy the baby's red blood cells if the mother and baby have different blood types. This usually produces visible jaundice within the first 24 hours of life and is the most serious type of jaundice.

### **How is jaundice diagnosed and treated?**

Your pediatrician may order a small blood sample to measure the bilirubin level. This test may be repeated one to multiple times to follow the level until it reaches a normal range and/or your baby does not require any further treatment.

Frequent feedings (breast milk or formula) help pass bilirubin out in the stool.

Your pediatrician may suggest placing the bassinet near a window for natural sunlight.

Your baby may be placed under a phototherapy light or blanket (in the nursery or at home), which breaks down the bilirubin in the skin so that it can be more easily removed from the body.

Rarely, if the bilirubin levels become dangerously high, a special blood transfusion may be needed, this would be performed by a specialist.

**Call our office for** any concerns of dehydration, skin color looking orange or deeply yellow, poor feeding, fever of 100.4 or higher, or no bowel movement in 24 hours.

**For any urgent or emergent medical concerns, please call 911 or go immediately to the nearest emergency department.**