



NEW YORK CITY
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Alister F. Martin, MD, MPP
Commissioner

A Letter to Our Healthcare Professionals

Re: Counseling Parents About Vitamin K and Hepatitis B Vaccination for Newborns

August 7, 2026

Dear Colleague,

Parental refusals of intramuscular **vitamin K prophylaxis** and the **hepatitis B vaccine birth dose** have been increasing nationally.¹⁻³ The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) strongly recommends both universal vitamin K prophylaxis and universal hepatitis B vaccination at birth. **This letter provides guidance for counseling new and expectant parents about the importance of these life-saving measures for their newborns.**

Ensure that all staff, including nurses, midwives, and doulas, are trained to discuss the importance of these interventions with parents.

Vitamin K

Why Vitamin K is Essential

- Vitamin K is a vitamin our bodies use to make blood clots. Without enough of it, even small amounts of bleeding can become dangerous.
- Babies can have life-threatening bleeding after birth. Bleeding can occur in places parents cannot see, like the intestines or the brain. Many babies develop bleeding suddenly without early symptoms.
- Babies are born with very little vitamin K in their bodies. Very low levels of Vitamin K cross the placenta, and levels are low in breast milk. Without the vitamin K injection at birth, it takes babies months to get enough vitamin K levels to be able to stop bleeding.

Benefits of the Vitamin K Injection

- **A one-time vitamin K injection within 6 hours of birth is highly effective and has been safely given to newborns in the US for more than 60 years.⁴**
- **Babies without the injection are 80 times more likely to experience severe bleeding, with 1 in 5 cases of severe bleeding among babies who did not receive the injection resulting in death.^{5,6}**
- Oral vitamin K is not approved for use in newborns by the US Food and Drug Administration and is significantly less effective than the one-time injection.⁵
- Vitamin K deficiency bleeding happens when a baby doesn't have enough vitamin K, so their blood can't clot and they can't stop bleeding. This is now rare because most infants get the vitamin K injection.

Addressing Concerns

Parents want their baby to be safe and healthy. Listen with respect and ask open-ended questions to understand their perspective. Answer their questions and share your recommendations with evidence-based information. Remember, you and the baby's parents have a shared goal; you all want what is best for their baby.

If parents express concerns, explain the following:

- **Pain: Comforting your baby and breastfeeding** during and immediately after the injection help relieve the temporary discomfort from the injection.
- **Ingredients:** Vitamin K is a nutrient that is found naturally in food. Sometimes the injection includes a very small amount of benzyl alcohol to help keep germs out. This amount is so small that it is safe for babies.
- **Dose:** The vitamin K dose babies are given at birth is higher than the daily vitamin K recommendation, because it needs to sustain them until they can get enough vitamin K from their diet. The dose is not too high for newborns.
- **Safety:** Large studies have found no evidence that vitamin K is associated with leukemia or any other cancers.⁷ While one small study in 1990 suggested a possible link, larger, more rigorous studies have not found a link.
- **Bonding with Baby for 60-90 minutes after birth:** For healthy newborns, vitamin K can be given after you've had the hour for bonding, breastfeeding, and skin-to-skin contact.

Hepatitis B Vaccine Birth Dose

- In New York, recommendations to administer hepatitis B vaccine to all infants within 24 hours of birth are unchanged, despite shifting federal guidance. For details, see [Hepatitis B Vaccination Recommendations in New York](#) (December 5, 2025).
- Key information to use when counseling parents about the importance of hepatitis B vaccination in infants is available in our [Health Advisory: Hepatitis B Birth Dose](#) (November 24, 2025).

For the latest immunization information in New York City, visit [NYC Health - Immunization Information for Health Care Professionals](#). Contact us with questions anytime at nycimmunize@health.nyc.gov or 347-396-2400.

Thank you for your dedication to protecting newborns from preventable illness.

Sincerely,



Toni Eyssallenne, MD, PhD
Deputy Chief Medical Officer
Office of the Chief Medical Officer



Andrea Howard, MD, MS
Deputy Commissioner
Division of Disease Control

Resources for Parents: Vitamin K

- [New York State Department of Health - Vitamin K Shot: Why does my newborn need it?](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics - Why Your Newborn Needs a Vitamin K Shot](#)
- [The New York Times - As Parents Reject Vitamin K Shots, Some Babies Develop Devastating Bleeding](#)
- [FOX 5 New York - Vitamin K Shot Refusal at Birth Linked to Rise in Infant Bleeding Deaths: Report](#)

Resources for Parents: Hepatitis B

- [American Academy of Pediatrics - Why Do Babies Need the Hepatitis B Vaccine?](#)
- [Children's Hospital of Philadelphia - Hepatitis B: The Disease & Vaccine](#)
- [Doctor Mike \(YouTube\) - Do Babies Really Need the Hepatitis B Vaccine?](#)

¹ Scott K, Miller E, Culhane JF, et al. Trends in vitamin K administration among infants. *JAMA*. 2026;335(3):272-274. [doi:10.1001/jama.2025.21460](#)

² Rothman JM, Kwan B, Longhurst CA, Jena AB. US newborn hepatitis B virus vaccination rates. *JAMA*. 2026;335(12):1086-1087. [doi:10.1001/jama.2026.0866](#)

³ Coggins SA, Flannery DD, Mukhopadhyay S, Puopolo KM. Parental decline of newborn Vitamin K and Hepatitis B vaccine administration by newborn sex. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2026;9(6):e2618410. [doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2026.18410](#)

⁴ Hand I, Noble L, Abrams SA; AAP Committee on Fetus and Newborn, Section on Breastfeeding, Committee on Nutrition. Vitamin K and the Newborn Infant. *Pediatrics*, 2022;149(3):e2021056036. [doi:10.1542/peds.2021-056036](#)

⁵ American Academy of Pediatrics. Vitamin K shots protect newborns from severe bleeding. March 1, 2022. Accessed August 3, 2026. <https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/19580/Vitamin-K-shots-protect-newborns-from-severe>

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Frequently asked questions about Vitamin K deficiency bleeding. January 17, 2025. Accessed August 3, 2026. <https://www.cdc.gov/vitamin-k-deficiency/faq/index.html>

⁷ Roman E, Fear NT, Ansell P, et al. Vitamin K and childhood cancer: analysis of individual patient data from six case-control studies. *Br J Cancer*. 2002;86(1):63-69. [doi:10.1038/sj.bjc.6600007](#)