

# Vaginal 'seeding' at Planned Caesarean

## What is vaginal seeding?

The term "vaginal seeding" describes the use of a gauze swab which is placed in the mother's vagina for one hour before an elective (planned) caesarean birth, and then is rubbed onto the baby's face, mouth and body to transfer maternal vaginal fluid and vaginal microbes, on to the newborn baby.

## Why is vaginal seeding done?

Babies born by caesarean are slightly more likely to develop conditions such as asthma, allergic diseases and obesity than babies born vaginally. Some people have suggested that the lack of maternal bacteria transferred during a vaginal birth might be the reason for this increased risk.

## Is there any research evidence?

There has been very little research. We don't know whether the technique is safe or effective. The only study which is completed (recruited 4 babies) was intended to explore the theory of microbial transfer, not to look at safety. All the mothers in this study were screened for potentially harmful microbes before their newborn babies were given vaginal seeding. A 5-year study is on-going and may provide more information.

## What are the risks of vaginal seeding?

Newborn babies may develop severe infections from exposure to vaginal microbes, which the mother may carry. These include Group B Streptococcus (GBS - the most common cause of newborn sepsis), E. coli, herpes simplex virus, Chlamydia and gonorrhoeae. Babies born by elective caesarean section do not acquire these microbes from the birth canal. In Ireland we do not routinely screen for GBS or other

sexually transmitted infections in pregnancy. There are many reasons for this which are beyond the scope of this information sheet.

## Who do we recommend should NOT do vaginal seeding?

- If waters have broken before the caesarean.
- If the mother has a high temperature or any other sign of an infection, or feels unwell.
- Women who are known to carry Group B Strep, HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C or women who have genital herpes.
- If the baby is unwell or preterm.

## Assistance with vaginal seeding

Currently we do not recommend or assist you with vaginal seeding until adequate data regarding the safety and benefit of the process become available. If you have read information elsewhere and decide to continue to do this despite our recommendations, then you have been informed of the risks. You are responsible for all aspects of vaginal seeding. No staff member is permitted to assist you until the safety of the procedure is proven.

## What do we recommend?

Parents who want to give their baby the best start after a caesarean section can try other, more established techniques. Skin-to-skin contact with the mother shortly after birth can help bonding – and microbe transfer. Breastfeeding is the best food for a baby and a good way to ensure transfer of healthy microbes in early life. The bacteria present in breast milk and on the skin will provide healthy flora for your baby.