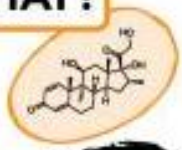
# USE OF ANTENATAL CORTICOSTEROIDS AT TERM, BEFORE PLANNED CAESAREAN BIRTH

Infographic supported by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

## WHO?


Steroids are sometimes offered to pregnant women due to have a planned Caesarean birth between 37 to 39 weeks' pregnant.

## WHAT?



Steroids are naturally occurring chemical messengers (hormones) which are essential for life. We offer a man-made version of steroids to some pregnant women before birth to benefit the baby.

We know that steroids help premature babies (born before 37 weeks) with their breathing.

## WHEN?

Steroids are given within the week leading up to the birth.

## HOW?

Steroids pass into the mother's blood, then cross the placenta, to reach the baby.

## WHY?

Babies born by planned Caesarean are more likely to have difficulties clearing the fluid in their lungs at birth, and are more likely to need to be admitted to the Neonatal Unit. This is an area which specialises in the care of unwell or premature newborn babies.

These risks are higher for babies born before 39 weeks.

Steroids probably reduce the chance that a baby born by Caesarean will need admission to the Neonatal Unit for breathing problems.

## SIDE EFFECTS FOR MOTHER

- Nausea
- Pain at injection site
- Flushing
- Rise in blood sugar if diabetes

## UNCERTAINTIES

Steroids are thought to be generally safe and have been used in Maternity settings for over thirty years, especially before premature birth. There is good evidence to show that steroids have benefits for babies born before 35 weeks.


However, there is less evidence on the benefits of steroids for babies born by Caesarean section after 37 weeks.


For babies born near their due date, by Caesarean section, it is still not clear if steroids can help to reduce breathing problems, or if steroids reduce the overall possibility a baby is admitted to a Neonatal Unit.

There is also some evidence that steroids given later in pregnancy might cause low blood sugars in baby after birth.

There is less information available on longer-term effects of steroids in babies, particularly those born near their due date.

Steroids given later in pregnancy might also affect a baby's brain development, leading to delay in reaching milestones or affecting educational achievement, however, the evidence for this is limited.

For more information scan here

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