Newborn Jaundice

To make sure your baby's first week is safe and healthy, we checked your baby for jaundice. This was done by drawing blood for a bilirubin level.

Your baby's bilirubin was _______ at _______ hours of age.

[ ] Your baby does not need to have another bilirubin level drawn at this time.

[ ] Your baby needs another bilirubin level drawn at __________ on _______________.
   Please take your baby to _____________________________________ to have this done.

[ ] A home health nurse will come to your home to take a sample of blood for a bilirubin level.

What is jaundice?

Jaundice (jon-diss) is a yellow color of the skin and whites of the eyes. It may be harder to see in babies with darker skin color. Almost all babies have some jaundice. Usually it is not serious, and is part of the normal changes that happen to a baby after birth. Jaundice develops during the first week of life and is caused by an increased amount of bilirubin (bil-ee-roo-bin) in the blood. Bilirubin is made from the normal breakdown of red blood cells. If the bilirubin level becomes too high, it can be dangerous.

A high level of bilirubin could cause a baby to have brain damage.

How can I tell if my baby has jaundice?

- **The best way to tell if a baby has a high bilirubin is to draw a very small sample of blood and measure the bilirubin in a laboratory.** The doctor did this test on your baby.

- If your doctor is concerned about the level of your baby's bilirubin, more blood tests will be ordered.

- You can also look for changes in the color of your baby's skin, the whites of the eyes, and inside your baby's mouth. If you gently press the skin with your finger, you may see the yellow color better.

- Some lights will make babies look more yellow than they really are. Looking in the daylight in a sunny room is best.

- When a baby becomes jaundiced, you will usually see it in the face first. As the bilirubin level goes up, the yellow color will move down the body to the chest, belly button, or even to the toes.

How is jaundice treated?

- If the bilirubin level is **okay**, your baby may not need any treatment. Your doctor might tell you to feed your baby breast milk or formula more often.

- If the bilirubin level is **very high** or getting higher quickly, your baby will be treated with special lights. This is called phototherapy. These special lights will help your baby's body get rid of the bilirubin.
What can I do to help my baby?

- If you are breastfeeding, nurse the baby every 2 to 3 hours, even during the night.
- If your baby is taking formula, feed your baby every 3 to 4 hours, even during the night.
- **If your baby needs more tests after going home, be sure to get these tests done on the day they are ordered.** Missing severe jaundice in a baby, even by one day, can increase the risk of brain damage.
- Your doctor will let you know if your baby needs special treatment for jaundice. **If you were given a blanket with lights for your baby, follow the instructions carefully.**
- The home health company who gave you the blanket to use is:
  
  Agency: ________________________________
  Phone Number: __________________________
- Call the home health company with any questions about the equipment.
- Putting your baby in sunlight is not the best way to treat jaundice and may be dangerous. Sunlight can only help lower the bilirubin level if your baby is completely undressed. Without clothes your baby will get cold, and can get sunburned in the sunlight outside.

When does jaundice go away?

- In breastfed babies, jaundice can last for more than 2 or 3 weeks, but it is usually mild and not harmful.
- In babies taking formula, jaundice usually goes away within 2 weeks.

Call your doctor if:

- Your baby is hard to wake up, is fussy, or does not nurse or take formula well.
- Your baby has a fever over 100.4° F (38° C).
- Your baby has less than 6 wet diapers a day.
- Your baby's skin looks more yellow.
- Your baby's body is yellow down to the belly button, or if the arms or legs are yellow.
- The whites of your baby's eyes are yellow.
- You have questions or concerns.