

# **Lumbar Puncture in a Newborn**

#### What is it?

A **lumbar puncture** (spinal tap) is a procedure to collect a small amount of spinal fluid. The **spinal fluid** is a clear liquid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord.

## Why does my baby need it?

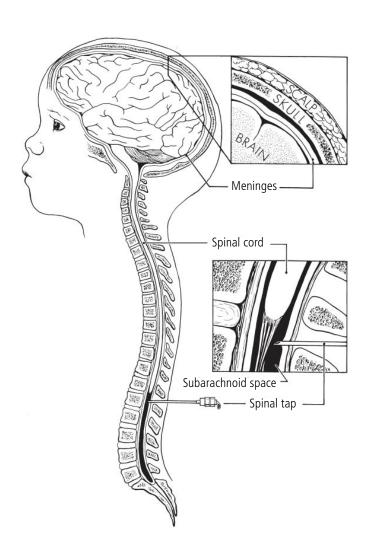
A lumbar puncture is usually done to check for serious illness or infection. By testing the sample of spinal fluid, doctors can learn whether your baby has meningitis or another illness. They can also check for bleeding around the brain and spine.

#### How is it done?

To get the sample, a doctor puts a small, hollow needle into the small of the back while a nurse or other care provider holds your baby in a curled-up position. The doctor first cleans the skin where the needle will go in, and may use a numbing medication in a cream or injection (shot). The doctor then inserts the hollow needle into the spinal canal and removes a small amount of fluid. Finally, the needle is taken out, and the area is cleaned and bandaged. The whole process can take up to an hour.

## What does it feel like?

A lumbar puncture may be uncomfortable. Your baby may feel coldness and wetness while his or her back is cleaned. If numbing medication is given with a shot, it will sting when it first goes in. Also, when the hollow needle goes in, your baby may feel pressure, and perhaps a few seconds of pain. To help comfort your baby, the care team may provide a pacifier or some other comfort measure during the procedure.



## What happens next?

After the procedure, the spinal fluid will be sent to a lab to be tested. Your doctor will share the results with you as soon as possible.

## Talking with your doctor about this treatment

The following table lists the most common potential benefits, risks, and alternatives for this treatment. Other benefits and risks may apply in your child's unique medical situation. The conversation you have with your child's healthcare provider is the most important part of learning about these risks and benefits. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It's important to have all your questions answered before you agree to a recommended treatment.

Potential benefits	Risks and potential complications	Alternatives
A lumbar puncture gives valuable information about your newborn's health. In some cases, the information is life saving.	<ul> <li>Infection where the spinal fluid was drawn.</li> <li>Bleeding into the spinal canal, or leakage of fluid from the canal.</li> <li>Damage to the spinal cord (very rare).</li> </ul>	In some cases, a lumbar puncture is the only way to learn the nature of your newborn's illness.