Vitamin K for your Newborn

What is Vitamin K?
Vitamin K is a necessary component in the body for the prevention of bleeding. It is needed in particular for the body's coagulation factors.

Where do we get Vitamin K?
Vitamin K is formed in the intestines due to a bacterial process, following the occurrence of digestion. Levels are usually adequate by approximately 8 days after birth, but they continue to increase for the first six weeks of life. This natural process of having low vitamin K levels in the fetus actually protects them while in the womb during cell division and development.

Why is Vitamin K so important?
Without vitamin K, bleeding in the brain can occur (see statistics below). In 90% of these cases, the babies are breastfed. This bleeding occurs much less in formula fed babies due to vitamin K being so unnaturally high in these formulas.

What are the risks of receiving vitamin K?
There are many reports that have shown a very minimal correlation between childhood leukemia and the use of vitamin K in infants. There are 1.5 more cases of leukemia per 100,000 children due to vitamin K injections. However, 1.8 permanent injuries or deaths per 100,000 babies occur due to brain bleeding without the vitamin K injection. Hemorrhagic disease of the newborn (HDN) usually occurs in the first week of life, but can occur up to 3 months of age.

Statistics:

- Incidence of early HDN (1st week): 1 to 6.8 per 400 births
- Incidence of late HDN (2-12 wks): 4.4 to 7.2 per 100,000 births
- Incidence of late HDN with oral vitamin K: 1.4 to 6.4 per 100,000 births
- Incidence of HDN with the administration of vitamin K at birth: Almost zero

How is vitamin K administered to the Newborn?
At CCBC, we give every newborn oral Vitamin K. We give one drop shortly after birth and another drop at the 24-48 hour postpartum visit. We also give another drop at the 2 week postpartum visit.

On occasion if a baby has any swelling or bruising, we will administer the vitamin K by injection shortly after the birth.