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Meconium Aspiration Syndrome: Information for Parents

A baby’s first stool is called *meconium*. It is green and black in color and thick in consistency. In some cases, a baby passes stool inside the womb before he or she is born. This can happen when the baby is under stress during labor. If the baby breathes in the stool before or during delivery, the baby can develop meconium aspiration syndrome (MAS). Not all babies who have a bowel movement before birth will develop MAS.

MAS happens when the baby breathes this thick fluid into his or her lungs before, during, or right after birth. MAS babies may develop trouble breathing and will need help to breathe. A skilled team will attend your delivery if you have meconium-stained fluid noted during labor.

If your baby is crying and active, treatment may not be needed. If the baby is not crying or active right after delivery, a tube is placed in the infant’s windpipe and suction is applied as the tube is pulled out. This might be repeated until the meconium is no longer seen in the suction tube. If the baby is not breathing or has a low heart rate, he or she may require help to start breathing. At delivery, oxygen and breaths given by face mask will help inflate the baby’s lungs.

Your baby may be placed in a special care nursery or new- born intensive care unit (NICU) for close observation.

Other treatments may include

* antibiotics to treat possible infections
* breathing machine (ventilator) to keep infant’s lungs open
* oxygen
* surfactant
* medicines to help keep their blood pressure stable (vasopressors)
* inhaled medicine to allow your baby’s blood vessels to relax (nitric oxide)
* a chest tube to reinflate a collapsed lung.

This can be a scary time for parents. The special care nursery or NICU team will be there to support you and answer your questions. It may take a few weeks for your baby’s lungs to heal so that they can begin to eat, grow, and go home. After you are able to go home, your baby may need frequent follow-up with specialized healthcare providers.