



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Preventing Preterm Birth

VAGINAL PROGESTERONE THERAPY

What does preterm birth mean?

A preterm birth (also called early or premature birth) means a baby is born *before* 37 weeks during a pregnancy. Most babies are born full term (37-42 weeks), but some women experience preterm birth.

How do I know if I am at risk?

- If you have had a previous pregnancy where your baby was born before 37 weeks.
- If your health care provider identified you are at a high risk for preterm birth based on the results of your ultrasound or other medical conditions.

There is medication that can help reduce preterm birth for people who are at risk, called **Vaginal Progesterone Therapy**.

Progesterone is a hormone made naturally by the ovaries and the placenta. People who are at risk for preterm birth can use progesterone in pill form to lower their risk.

How does it work?

Your health care provider will have you start this therapy between 16 and 24 weeks and continue until 37 weeks of your pregnancy. Once a day at bedtime you will need to insert the small tablets of progesterone into your vagina.

Vaginal Progesterone Therapy is a non-benefit item; however, BC PharmaCare Drug plan will cover it under an exception. Your health care provider will need to complete a Special Authority request.

If the pharmacy wants you to pay for this medication, ask the pharmacist to call you when they get the Special Authority approval.

If you have questions, call FNHA Health Benefits at 1-855-550-5454 or access online at fnha.ca/benefits. If there is a long delay in getting your medication, please notify your health care provider.

Frequently Asked Questions and Concerns

Q. Are there side effects to this medication?

A. It is normal and understandable to be concerned about potential side effects. Like most medications, **Vaginal Progesterone Therapy** does have side effects listed with the pharmacy packaging. Research shows that the risk of serious side effects from this therapy is low. There are no known side effects of this therapy for the baby. If you are feeling worried or have questions, talk with your health care provider or pharmacist.

“I was quite upset when I read the pharmacy information about progesterone. I called my doctor and she explained that the information is mainly for women who are older and taking the pills by mouth for menopause. With this information, I decided to go ahead with vaginal progesterone therapy and I am glad I made this decision. My baby was born at 39 weeks and we went home the next day. My last baby was at 35 weeks and was in the NICU for 10 days. I barely held him for the first two days.”

Q. I asked my mother about Vaginal Progesterone Therapy because she had some of her babies early. Why hasn't she heard of it?

A. Treatment recommendations change over time and more medical professionals are recommending this medication based on its benefits to patients.

Q. What are the benefits of having my baby after 37 weeks of pregnancy?

A. Babies born after 37 weeks of pregnancy:

- have more fully developed bodies and are able to physically and emotionally bond with parents and care-givers;
- find it easier to breastfeed;
- are less likely to stay in hospital for long and can usually go home sooner;
- have less chance of short term complications that may require specialized care (e.g., treatment of infections or breathing/feeding assistance); and
- are less likely to develop long term complications including heart and lung disease, hearing and vision loss, and developmental challenges.

If you have questions related to preterm labour and birth, talk with your health care provider.

It is important to care for your physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional wellness throughout your pregnancy.

*Listen to your body, and reach out to your supports if you need to.
You know your body and your baby best.*