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Bacterial Bath to Boost Baby's Microbiome: Helpful or Harmful?

Microbiological research has deduced that our immunity is dependent upon the gut harboring bacteria that inhabit the body as we exit the womb on our first day of life. Cesarean section (CS) newborns are not exposed to the normal flora of the vaginal canal; thus, they establish different microbial environments than vaginally delivered newborns. In 2018, 31.9% of deliveries in the US were by CS. A 2015 publication in the journal Lancet marked an increase in CS births globally, reporting 29.7 million CS births annually. This systematic review unpacks the risks versus benefits of a trend called vaginal seeding, where CS newborns are inoculated with the microbes they are lacking from the vaginal canal. The results show that the vaginal microbiome cannot be fully replicated, but the microbiomes of infants born via CS and vaginal delivery become very similar later in infancy even without vaginal seeding. In other words, there is no proven benefit. Importantly, there are potential harms. In conclusion, CS newborns should not be swabbed with vaginal secretions to boost their baby microbiome.