Ultimate Guide to Kernicterus (Severe Jaundice)

Prepared for Families by Funk Law Group — Birth Injury Division

Introduction

If your child was diagnosed with Kernicterus (Severe Jaundice), you may feel overwhelmed and unsure of what this means for your baby's future. This guide was written specifically for parents to help clarify what happened, why it happened, and what steps you can take moving forward.

What This Condition Means

Kernicterus is a severe form of brain injury caused by dangerously high bilirubin levels (jaundice). It is 100% preventable with proper monitoring and treatment.

Early signs of jaundice must be recognized and treated to prevent lifelong neurological injury.

How This Injury Can Happen

Not all injuries are caused by medical mistakes. But many are the result of delayed care or missed warning signs.

Common causes include:

• Delayed C-section • Failure to monitor fetal distress • Misuse of delivery tools • Failure to diagnose infection • Loss of oxygen during delivery • Poor communication among staff

Warning Signs Doctors Should Have Recognized

Parents often find out afterward that warning signs were present. These may include:

• Abnormal fetal heart tracings • Maternal infection or fever • Meconium staining • Decreased fetal movement • Prolonged labor • Shoulder dystocia complications

How Doctors Diagnose This Injury

Diagnosis may involve:

• MRI or ultrasound imaging • APGAR scores • Blood tests including cord gases • Neurological exams • NICU monitoring

What This Means for Your Child's Future

Many children with birth injuries thrive with proper support. Depending on the condition, your child may need: • Physical, occupational, or speech therapy • Feeding assistance • Mobility support • Early intervention • Long-term specialists

Early treatment makes a significant difference.

What Parents Should Do Now

You do not need to do everything at once. Most parents start with:

1. Requesting full medical records. 2. Keeping a notebook of symptoms and appointments. 3. Asking NICU staff clear questions. 4. Starting early intervention. 5. Speaking with a birth injury attorney to understand whether the injury was preventable.

Understanding Your Legal Rights

Medical providers must follow safety rules. Lawyers and medical experts work together to determine:

• Whether the doctors followed accepted medical practices • Whether warning signs were ignored • Whether delays caused the injury • Whether faster action would have prevented harm

You are not expected to know this — that is our role.

Types of Experts Who Review These Cases

Birth injury cases often require specialists such as:

• Neonatologists • OB-GYNs • Maternal-Fetal Medicine doctors • Pediatric neurologists • Neuroradiologists • Placental pathologists • Nursing experts • Life-care planners

Common Real-World Examples

Examples of preventable scenarios include:

• Delayed C-section despite fetal distress • Improper shoulder dystocia maneuvers • Untreated jaundice developing into kernicterus • Forceps/vacuum used with excessive force • Uterine rupture not recognized in time • Untreated infection leading to sepsis