Neonatal jaundice at a glance

Physiologic vs pathologic, by timing and bilirubin fraction



Step by step

1. Is any conjugated bilirubin raised? Pathological.
2. Jaundice in the first 24 hours? Pathological.
3. Fast rise, or still yellow after 2 weeks in a term baby? Pathological.
4. Well baby, after 24 hours, peak day 3 to 4? Physiologic.

When	Think of
First day	Haemolysis (ABO, Rh, G6PD); sepsis
First week	Breastfeeding jaundice
After first week	Breast milk jaundice
Conjugated (often 2 wk+)	Biliary atresia

Causes by timing

Rule of thumb

Conjugated is never physiologic

First day means haemolysis until proved otherwise

Exam traps

- Jaundice in the first 24 hours is never physiologic.
- Coombs may be weak or negative in ABO disease.
- Phototherapy thresholds depend on age in hours, not on the total alone.

Neonatal jaundice: physiologic vs pathologic

Video, written lesson, practice question and sources: medservatory.com/usmle-step-2-ck/paediatrics/neonatal-jaundice-physiologic-vs-pathologic

For exam study only, not medical advice. Follow local guidelines and your lab's ranges.
© 2026 Medservatory, a project of ADMR Solutions Ltd. Free to print and share for personal study.