

Newborn Eye Prophylaxis

Eye prophylaxis is the placement of medication in the eyes of an infant to prevent an eye infection called *ophthalmia neonatorum*. The two known causes of *ophthalmia neonatorum* are the sexually transmitted infections (STIs) gonorrhea and chlamydia. This infection occurs in the newborn when the birthing parent has contracted chlamydia or gonorrhea and passes the infection to the infant as they move through the birth canal. An antibiotic called erythromycin in the form of a gel is placed in the eyes of the newborn shortly after birth. The purpose of this antibiotic eye ointment is to prevent eye infection from chlamydia and gonorrhea in infants younger than 4 weeks of age. The risks of this treatment are obscured vision for several hours, and potential reaction to the antibiotic. Because the antibiotic is administered locally in an ointment form, the risk of a negative reaction is extremely low.

If an infant is infected with chlamydia or gonorrhea and this eye ointment is not given they can develop a serious infection that may lead to permanent eye damage or blindness. Michigan law requires all infants receive erythromycin eye ointment within one hour after birth. The law does not require parents to give permission, however they can withhold permission. As a parent you have the right to refuse permission for prophylactic treatment of your newborn.

A vaginal culture can be taken during pregnancy to determine if you carry either gonorrhea or chlamydia. However, a negative culture is not a guarantee that infection will not occur as you can contract one of these diseases after you been tested but before giving birth, and they can be difficult to detect. Speak to your midwife or another healthcare provider if you believe you are at risk for carrying a sexually transmitted infection. Gonorrhea and chlamydia can negatively impact your health and pregnancy in other ways, and they can be treated quickly with antibiotics once detected. Nine Short Months recommends full STI screening in anyone who believes they may be at risk.

Your options include:

- Give permission to treat the baby per state health requirement. Midwife will administer eye prophylaxis to the infant within one hour of birth.
- Run a vaginal culture for gonorrhea and chlamydia: treat the baby if culture is positive
- Decline permission to treat the baby

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Electronically signed by: Eye Prophylaxis Sample Form

Date: 06/11/2021