

Antibiotic Eye Ointment after Delivery

What is Ophthalmia Neonatorum (ON)?

Ophthalmia Neonatorum (ON) is an eye infection that can happen up to four weeks after birth. This infection can happen during birth if the mother has an untreated sexually transmitted infection (i.e. gonorrhea or chlamydia).

Most babies are not at any risk for ON. Some babies after delivery may need to receive antibiotic eye ointment (erythromycin) to prevent ON. This need is determined based on the mother's health history.

Your health care team will discuss if any tests for the mother are needed. Possible treatments for your baby will be based on the mother's health history.

What may happen if my baby has an eye infection from delivery?

- You may notice:
 - discharge from the eye
 - pain and tenderness of the eye
 - swollen eyelids
 - damage to the eye
- If you have untreated gonorrhea or chlamydia, problems your baby may experience include:
 - scarring of the cornea
 - damage to the eye and/or vision loss
 - newborn pneumonia

You should check your baby's eyes for the above signs of infection after delivery.

Routine Screening & Treatment for infections during pregnancy reduces the risk of your baby getting an eye infection after delivery.

Will my baby be given the eye ointment to prevent an infection?

- Your Nurse, Doctor or Midwife will perform routine screening for sexually transmitted infections (this is usually done as part of routine prenatal care). Once the results are reviewed with you, your medical team will help to make a decision whether or not your baby will need the eye ointment.
- Once your healthcare team discusses your options and if the risk to your baby is low, you will be asked to sign a form to not give the ointment.
- In Ontario, your healthcare team is legally required to give the ointment. However, if the risk to your baby is low, you can ask for it not to be put in your baby's eyes.



For more information, you can visit the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website and/or the Provincial Council for Maternal and Child Health. The Canadian Pediatric Society is also a good source of information.

<https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/ophthalmia-neonatorum>

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/legislation/opth_neo/docs/opt_neo.pdf

<https://www.pcmch.on.ca/erythromycin-ophthalmic-ointment/>