

Erythromycin Eye Prophylaxis

Background

The Health Protection and Promotion Act states:

Communicable diseases of the eyes 33. (1) Every physician, public health nurse or other health care professional person attending at the birth of a child shall ensure that the requirements prescribed by the regulations in respect of communicable diseases of the eyes of the new-born child are complied with. R.S.O. 1990, c. H.7, s. 33.

Health Care Consent Act, 1996 (2) The Health Care Consent Act, 1996 does not apply to the requirements prescribed by the regulations in respect of communicable diseases of the eyes of the new-born child. 1996, c. 2, s. 67 (2).

- During birth your babies' eyes may be exposed to bacteria that can cause eye infections
- Chlamydia and gonorrhea eye infections can cause blindness
- Other bacteria can also cause eye infections that are less severe
- We offer erythromycin antibiotic ointment in the first few hours after birth, in compliance with the above law, to reduce these risks

Medication

- 0.5% erythromycin ophthalmic ointment

Risks of treatment

- Erythromycin ointment can cloud vision for a few minutes
- A small number of babies (less than 1 out of 10) will have watery eyes a short while
- There is good consensus among experts that this treatment is safe

Context

Our midwives usually administer this medication after you have spent some time cuddling and nursing your baby, to minimize the impact of blurred vision on bonding. Please ask your midwife any questions you have about eye prophylaxis.

References

British Columbia Reproductive Care Program. Newborn care guideline 11: eye care and prevention of ophthalmia neonatorum. March 2001.

<http://www.search.e-laws.gov.on.ca/en/isysquery/465f97cd-3fcc-4035-9b3a-e7f81e52f10f/1/doc/?search=browseStatutes&context=#hit2>