**Erythromycin Eye Ointment Treatment for Newborns**

**What is Ophthalmia Neonatorum?**

Ophthalmia Neonatorum (ON) is an acute inflammation of the eyes and inner surface of the eyelids that occurs within the first four weeks of life. It is caused by chemical, bacterial, or viral processes. Most women receive routine prenatal care in pregnancy for sexual transmitted infections and are treated. However, **untreated** sexually transmitted infections such as gonorrhea or chlamydia can cause ON and be transmitted from pregnant patients during birth to the newborn.

**What are the consequences for newborns who acquire Ophthalmia Neonatorum?**

Symptoms of ON can include eye discharge, pain and tenderness in the eye, and swollen eyelids. Complications to the newborn from ON can include corneal scarring, ocular perforation, and blindness. Complications from ON caused by gonorrhea can be severe and can lead to scarring of the cornea, perforation, and permanent vision loss. Chlamydia is a leading cause of ON and can lead to newborn pneumonia.

**What are some of the benefits and risks of prophylactic eye drops to prevent transmission of ON to newborns?**

Historically, the application of prophylactic antibiotic eye drops has significantly reduced the chances of a newborn contracting ON. The potential risks of this treatment are commonly mild and temporary when experienced and can include eye irritation, redness, itching, blurred vision, and sensitivity to light.

**What are the recommendations from the Canadian Paediatric Society?**

Routine administration is not recommended by the Canadian Paediatric Society in **all** newborns for several reasons:

1. Women now receive routine screening in pregnancy for chlamydia and gonorrhea, and are treated if the infections are present.
2. The ointment may cause mild eye irritation in some infants, and may interfere with mother-infant bonding.
3. Erythromycin may no longer be an effective antibiotic at preventing eye infection.

**Are healthcare professionals required to administer prophylactic eye drops to newborns?**

Based on the current legislation, healthcare professionals attending the birth of a child are required in Ontario to instill prophylactic antibiotic into the eyes of newborns within one hour after delivery to destroy any infectious agent that might cause ON. However, by law, you can opt-out of erythromycin eye ointment treatment for newborns.

**When you are admitted to Labour and Delivery, you will be presented with an opt-out request form that you may wish to sign if you have read the information above, you have engaged in discussions with your healthcare professional, and you do not wish for your newborn to receive the erythromycin eye ointment after delivery.**

For more information please follow the link below:

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/legislation/opth_neo/default.aspx>

References

Moore, D.L., & MacDonald, N.E. (2018, February 28). Preventing ophthalmia neonatorum. *Canadian Paediatric Society.* Retrieved from <https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/ophthalmia-neonatorum>

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