

Eye Infections in Newborns Caused by Gonorrhea and Chlamydia

Gonorrhea (“gah-nuh-REE-uh”) and chlamydia (“kluh-MID-ee-uh”) are common sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Gonorrhea and chlamydia are bacteria that can be passed from an infected pregnant woman to their baby during birth. Both gonorrhea and chlamydia can cause eye infections in newborns.

- Newborn eye infections caused by gonorrhea can lead to permanent eye damage or blindness.
- Newborn eye infections caused by chlamydia are less dangerous for the eyes, but can lead to pneumonia (lung infection).
- An eye infection in a newborn may also be called:
 - › neonatal ophthalmia
 - › ophthalmia neonatorum
 - › newborn conjunctivitis (“kon-junk-tih-VY-tis”, also known as pink eye)
- Eye infections in newborns are not usually caused by gonorrhea or chlamydia. **Although newborn eye infections caused by gonorrhea and chlamydia are rare, they are serious and must be treated quickly to avoid long-term complications.**

How can I prevent my newborn from getting an eye infection caused by gonorrhea or chlamydia?

- **All pregnant people should be offered a test for gonorrhea and chlamydia as a standard part of prenatal care.** You can ask to be retested at any time during your pregnancy. You should be offered a retest during your pregnancy if you are at a higher risk of getting gonorrhea or chlamydia. Ask your family health care provider if you think you are at a higher risk.
- If you have not been tested during your pregnancy, or if you have been infected but have not received treatment such as antibiotics, you will be offered the test as soon as possible when you go into labour or after the birth of your baby.
- If gonorrhea or chlamydia infection is found, you and your sexual partner(s) should be treated with antibiotics. After treatment, you should be tested again in 3 to 4 weeks for gonorrhea and chlamydia to make sure that the infection is gone.
- **Erythromycin eye ointment is an antibiotic. It can be applied to your newborn’s eyes after birth to help prevent an eye infection caused by gonorrhea. Erythromycin eye ointment is recommended for your newborn if:**
 - › you were **NOT** tested for gonorrhea and chlamydia during pregnancy
 - › you tested positive for gonorrhea and/or chlamydia but did not receive treatment or followup
 - › you had a higher risk of getting these STIs during pregnancy

- If you tested positive for gonorrhoea in pregnancy and were not treated before your baby was born, we recommend that your newborn receive one dose of antibiotics before leaving the hospital.
- If you tested positive for chlamydia in pregnancy and were not treated before your baby was born, we recommend that your newborn be followed closely by your family health care provider for signs of eye infection and pneumonia.

How will I know if my baby has an eye infection?

- Newborns' eyes make tears continuously (all the time) to clean their eyes and keep them moist. Tears drain from the inner eye into the nose through tear ducts. In the first few months after birth, these narrow ducts can get clogged. This can cause a buildup of discharge in the eye.
- Normal newborn eye discharge may be white or yellow and may cause the eyelids or eyelashes to stick together. You can gently wipe it away with a clean, soft, wet washcloth. **Newborn eye discharge is VERY common. If there is no eye infection, this discharge is harmless.**
- If there is an eye infection, there will be eye discharge **AND** signs of inflammation. This inflammation looks like pink eye (conjunctivitis). With an eye infection, one or both eyes will have redness or pinkness in the white part of the eye, and the eyelid(s) will look red and irritated.

Signs of a newborn eye infection caused by gonorrhoea or chlamydia are usually seen within the first week or two after birth. These include:

- › **LOTS** of eye discharge that looks like pus (a thick, yellowish or greenish liquid that is not clear/see-through)
- › **VERY** swollen or irritated eyelid(s)
- › **LOTS** of redness and irritation in the white part of the eye(s)

If you think your newborn may have an eye infection, contact one of the following right away:

- › your baby's family health care provider
- › your local women and children's health unit
- › your baby's public health nurse
- › 811

If your baby is at a higher risk of getting an eye infection caused by gonorrhoea or chlamydia, your nurse may give you instructions for after you leave the hospital. Instructions:
