

What is the newborn eye medication?

It is standard practice to give preventative treatment to the newborn's eyes with an antibiotic ointment. The antibiotic most commonly used is erythromycin. The ointment is similar in texture to Vaseline. It is squeezed from a tube directly in the baby's eyes within an hour after birth, during his/her newborn exam.



Why is this treatment done?

The purpose of this prophylactic treatment is to prevent eye infections caused by the sexually transmitted diseases Chlamydia and Gonorrhea. If these bacteria are present in the mother's vagina during birth, they can be passed onto the baby and lead to infection. Eye infection due to Chlamydia is the leading cause of blindness in the developing world (where antibiotics are not readily available). Eye ointment may also protect against other bacteria present in the vagina that can cause eye infections.

What are the downsides of treatment?

According to the American Center for Disease Control, after antibiotic prophylaxis 15-25% of infants exposed to Chlamydia will still develop conjunctivitis (eye infection or irritation). Treatment will cause blurred vision for a few hours after being given. Because of this, some parents are concerned that the ointment may interfere with bonding by blurring vision or causing the baby to become fussy. To minimize any negative side effects, we delay application for at least the first hour, giving mom and baby time to bond and have their first feeding. If the medication is given just before your baby falls asleep, the majority of it will be absorbed by the time your baby wakes up again. Another concern is exposure to antibiotics, which can cause system imbalance: antibiotic-resistant, infection-causing bacteria continue to grow, while other normal and healthful bacteria are killed. Because of the minimal amount of antibiotics in this treatment, this is not considered a large concern.

What if I know I don't have a Sexually Transmitted Infection?

You were probably tested for Chlamydia and Gonorrhea earlier in your pregnancy. Check with your midwife if you are unsure or don't know the results. Since both of these diseases can be "silent", do not rely on being symptom-free as a sign that you or your partner(s) do not have an infection. If you are confident that you have not acquired either of these infections since then, you may decide not to give your baby the eye ointment. This includes being absolutely confident that your sexual partner(s) do not have these diseases either, which they may have passed on to you. We do require that a waiver be signed stating you received education on this topic and have chosen to waive this recommended treatment.

For more information, please go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/conjunctivitis/newborns.html>