

EYE OINTMENT AFTER BIRTH

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WHAT IS ERYTHROMYCIN?

A treatment recommended that all newborns get within an hour of birth is an **antibiotic eye ointment called erythromycin**. The ointment is used to prevent dangerous cases of bacterial conjunctivitis, or "pink eye". This treatment is considered **standard of care** and is mandatory in California.

WHY SHOULD I USE ERYTHROMYCIN?

While conjunctivitis has many different causes (including infection, allergy, and irritation), gonorrhea can cause a very severe infection. Erythromycin is used to prevent conjunctivitis caused by the bacteria *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* which causes gonorrhea. If **left untreated**, newborn conjunctivitis caused by gonorrhea can lead to **serious eye injuries** such as corneal scarring and ocular perforation causing vision problems, or blindness **as soon as 24 hours**.

AFTER USE SYMPTOMS

The ointment may cause the eyes to appear cloudy and, in some cases, cause redness, but these symptoms are temporary.

Symptoms of newborn conjunctivitis:

- Red or pink color in the white of the eyes
- Swollen eyelids
- Thick, pus-like discharge

Symptoms of gonorrheal conjunctivitis start in the first several days of life. Regardless of the cause of conjunctivitis, if you notice that your baby starts to have the symptoms outlined above, see a medical provider right away.

The cases of gonorrhea in Fresno County in 2023 were much higher than the state and national average. While it is routine to test for gonorrhea infections during pregnancy, it is also possible to get infected or re-infected later in pregnancy. Getting tested during pregnancy and using preventive measures like the erythromycin ointment are ways to **ensure higher chances that your baby is safe and healthy**.

Although **erythromycin** is required, it is also refusable. Parents who wish to deny treatment must sign an Against Medical Advice (AMA) form, a waiver indicating that they are aware of the risks of refusing treatment.

SOURCES AND LEARN MORE:

Healthy Fresno County Data - Sexually Transmitted Infections:

bit.ly/3Pj9foD

Evidence Based Birth - Erythromycin Eye Ointment for Newborns: bit.ly/47aThf8

Healthy Children - Erythromycin Eye Ointment for Newborn Pinkeye: bit.ly/4tdZX4T

National Library of Medicine - Risks of Infectious Diseases:

bit.ly/4rH9CzB

CDC - Gonococcal Infections Among Neonates: bit.ly/4lHivTO

