

Learning About Bacterial Conjunctivitis in Newborns



What is bacterial conjunctivitis?

Newborn conjunctivitis (say "kun-JUNK-tih-VY-tus) is a redness and swelling of the lining of the eyelid and the surface of the eye that sometimes happens to newborn babies. It may cause yellow or green drainage from the eye.

Newborns can get these symptoms by being infected with bacteria in the birth canal or from the skin. It can happen in vaginal births and C-sections. The symptoms can also be caused by a blocked tear duct, an irritation, or a virus.

The most serious eye infection is caused by the same bacteria that cause sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like gonorrhea or chlamydia. Without treatment, the infection can cause scars on the eyes. In some cases, it can cause blindness.

How can you prevent it?

During pregnancy, it's a good idea to get tested for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), even if you don't think you have one. Getting tested can help protect your baby. If you find out that you have an STI, you can get treatment before the birth.

About an hour after the birth, your doctor or midwife will give medicine to your baby. It's an ointment that is put into both eyes. It kills one of the bacteria that cause newborn conjunctivitis. This bacteria is the same one that causes gonorrhea.

How is it treated?

If your baby's eyes become infected, the doctor may swab the fluid that drains from your baby's eyes. The fluid can then be tested to find the cause of the infection.

If the cause is bacteria, your baby will be treated with an antibiotic. If the infection is caused by chlamydia or gonorrhea, antibiotics are given in the baby's mouth or as a shot. In some cases, it may be given through a

blood vessel. Antibiotic eye drops or ointments may be used if the infection is from another type of bacteria.

When should you call for help?

Call your doctor now or seek medical care right away if:

- Your baby has new or worse redness in the eyes.
- Your baby's eyes start to drain, or any drainage gets worse.
- Your baby's eyes have new or worse swelling.
- Your baby has trouble opening their eyes.
- Your baby has any new symptoms, such as a fever or cough.

Follow-up care is a key part of your child's treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if your child is having problems. It's also a good idea to know your child's test results and keep a list of the medicines your child takes.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **X593** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About Bacterial Conjunctivitis in Newborns**".

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