

Foothills Midwifery

Information on Eye Medication

In Alberta, it is standard practice to give prophylactic treatment to the newborn's eyes with an antibiotic ointment. The purpose of this is to prevent eye infections caused specifically by gonorrhea and/or chlamydia.

Both of these infections may be asymptomatic in the mother (she may have no symptoms but still have the infection). If these organisms are present in the mothers' vagina during birth, they can be passed onto the baby and lead to infection. If left untreated, these infections can lead to blindness in your baby, or more rarely to systemic infection and illness.

You may choose to accept eye medication for your newborn if you or your partner have, or suspect you have, either chlamydia or gonorrhea, or if you want to provide an extra margin of safety for your baby. You may have been tested in early pregnancy for these two organisms. In Alberta, the eye medication of choice is erythromycin. It is given in the form of an ointment and is placed in your baby's eyes within the first few hours of birth. It does not appear to hurt the baby, but may cause blurred vision for up to 12 hours after being given. Most newborn babies are alert for an hour or two immediately after birth, and then fall asleep. 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. It is your midwives' intention to allow time for you and your partner to bond with your baby. Therefore the timing of this medication can be to your preference, although it remains suggested within 1-2 hours of the birth.

You may choose not to give your baby any eye medication if neither you nor your partner have either of these infections.

If you choose not to give any eye medication, watch for signs of infection and alert your care provider if any occur. Some redness and swelling on your baby's eyes is normal, especially in the first few days. If infection, or a suspected infection occurs, cultures can be taken to determine which organism is responsible and appropriate treatment given. Signs of infection include redness, discharge, and swelling of the eyes.