

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

Health Alert Network

Update

2/15/2024

Ophthalmic erythromycin ointment shortage

The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends ocular prophylaxis for all newborns within 24 hours of birth to prevent ophthalmia neonatorum caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, which can result in severe and permanent damage including blindness

(<https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/document/RecommendationStatementFinal/ocular-prophylaxis-for-gonococcal-ophthalmia-neonatorum-preventive-medication>).

Erythromycin 0.5% ophthalmic ointment is the only medication recommended for ocular prophylaxis, and it is in short supply nationally (<https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/gonorrhea-neonates.htm>). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has issued guidance for alternatives during the shortage

(<https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/27757/AAP-Use-ceftriaxone-to-prevent-newborn-eye>) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has enabled a temporary importation of erythromycin ointment from Canada (<https://www.fda.gov/media/175323/download>).

Facilities in Nebraska who are experiencing or anticipating an erythromycin ointment shortage should:

- Alert DHHS to their short supply status by notifying jillian.chance@nebraska.gov
- If supply is exhausted, pregnant patients at increased risk of exposure should be tested (i.e., with a nucleic acid amplification test) and if results are positive or pending at the time of discharge, the infant should receive 25-50 mg/kg ceftriaxone, not to exceed 250 mg in a single dose. Increased risk includes women <25 years old, and those 25 years or older who have a new partner, more than one sex partner, a sex partner with concurrent partners, or a sex partner who has a sexually transmitted infection (STI), or live in a community with high rates of gonorrhea, practice inconsistent condom use when not in a mutually monogamous relationship, have a previous or coexisting STI, have a history of exchanging sex for money or drugs; or have a history of incarceration (<https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/recommendation/chlamydia-and-gonorrhea-screening>; <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/gonorrhea-neonates.htm>)
- To order erythromycin ointment from Canadian pharmaceutical company Fera Pharmaceuticals, call 414-434-6604 and see this letter from FDA for details: <https://www.fda.gov/media/175323/download>

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