



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

www.nwhu.on.ca

November 9, 2020

Health Care Provider Advisory: Erythromycin newborn eye ointment shortage

There is currently a shortage of erythromycin ophthalmic ointment (1gm packing size) in Canada. There is no active shortage reported for the 3.5g product. Since there is no recommended safe alternative medication to be used prophylactically for newborns instead of erythromycin, please use the attached algorithms for screening and response to lab results to support your assessment and decision making.

Please include a note in the newborn health record provided to parents indicating whether erythromycin ophthalmic ointment was administered or not. All parents should be advised of the symptoms of ophthalmia neonatorum, monitor for these symptoms within the first four weeks of life, and seek medical treatment at any signs of infection.

Stocks of erythromycin are projected to return to normal by two suppliers on January 15, 2021 and March 31, 2021. At this point, routine administration of ophthalmic prophylaxis to the eyes of newborns should continue as required under Regulation 557 of the *Health Promotion and Protection Act*.

Algorithms for screening and response to lab results:

- [Flow Chart for Management of Infants & Mothers During Erythromycin Eye Ointment Shortage Screening Algorithm](#)
- [Flow Chart for Management of Infants & Mothers During Erythromycin Eye Ointment Shortage Response to Lab Results Algorithm](#)

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Gillian Lunny

Manager, Sexual Health and Harm Reduction
Northwestern Health Unit
210 First St North
Kenora, ON P9N2K4
(807) 468-3147 ext. 301340

