

HALTON REGION HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH  
TEL: 905-825-6000 FAX: 905-825-1444

TO: Halton Physicians  
Medical Chiefs of Staff: Joseph Brant Hospital, Halton Healthcare (Oakville, Milton and Georgetown Hospitals)  
Chairs of: Family Practice, Paediatrics, Internal Medicine, Emergency, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Surgery  
Chief of Laboratory Services and Infection Control Practitioners

POST IN: Emergency Department and Physicians Lounge

FROM: Dr. Julie Emili, Associate Medical Officer of Health

DATE: January 15, 2019

**RE: Change in regulation for administration of ophthalmic prophylaxis for newborns**

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Healthcare professionals are legally required in Ontario to administer ophthalmic prophylaxis to the eyes of all newborns to prevent Ophthalmia Neonatorum (ON). Effective January 1, 2019, an amendment to *Regulation 557 Communicable Diseases – General of the Health Protection and Promotion Act* will allow **parents to opt-out** of the mandatory prophylactic eye treatment.

ON is an acute inflammation of the eyes and inner surface of the eyelids that occurs within the first four weeks of life. ON is caused by chemical, viral or bacterial infections such as untreated gonorrhea or chlamydia transmitted during birth. Complications from ON due to gonorrhea and/or chlamydia can lead to scarring of the cornea, perforation, permanent vision loss and pneumonia.

An opt-out request, made by a parent in writing to their healthcare professional, may only be granted if the healthcare professional attending at the birth of the infant is satisfied that:

- The parent of the infant making the request has received information on the benefits and risks of administration of the ophthalmic agent;
- The parent has received information on the likely consequences of non-administration of the ophthalmic agent; and
- An assessment has been done by a regulated health professional to confirm there is no serious risk of transmission to the infant of an infectious agent that might cause ON.

Prophylactic eye treatment for newborns at the time of birth will remain the default for healthcare delivery unless an opt-out request is granted. The parental opt-out provision should not be used as a mechanism to address the ongoing national shortage of erythromycin ophthalmic ointment which is used for the prophylaxis of ophthalmia neonatorum. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is collecting information on stock inventory and utilization of erythromycin ophthalmic ointment products and will facilitate potential reallocations should they be needed to address urgent situations.

Please report all suspected or confirmed cases of [Diseases of Public Health Significance](#) (formerly Reportable Diseases) to the Halton Region Health Department as soon as possible. Diseases marked \* should be reported immediately by telephone (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) or fax (Mon-Fri, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm only). Other diseases can be reported the next working day. Call 311, 905-825-6000 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866. For general information, please visit [halton.ca](http://halton.ca).

**If any link provided in this memo does not work, please cut and paste it into your web browser.**