

# MANDATORY EYE OINTMENT FOR THE NEWBORN

## WHAT IS EYE OINTMENT?

Eye ointment containing an antibiotic medication is placed in a newborn's eyes after birth. This is to protect the baby from any infection acquired during the birth process from the mother's body.

## WHY IS IT MANDATORY?

Missouri law **requires** administration of eye ointment at birth. Failure to administer the ointment is classified as a misdemeanor.

Missouri Revised Statutes, Section 210.070:

*Every physician, midwife or nurse who shall be in attendance upon a newborn infant or its mother, **shall** drop into the eyes of such infant immediately after delivery, a prophylactic solution approved by the state department of health and senior services, and shall within forty-eight hours thereafter, report in writing to the board of health or county physician of the city, town or county where such birth occurs, his or her compliance with this section, stating the solution used by him or her.*

Missouri Revised Statutes, Section 210.100:

*Any person violating the provisions of Sections 210.070 to 210.090 shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor.*

The above law was put into effect at a time when thousands of infants suffered permanent blindness as a result of severe eye infections acquired during the birth process from their mothers. Giving eye medication shortly after birth prevents almost all of these infections.

The ointment may cause a baby's eyes to appear cloudy and some newborns' eyes may become irritated with redness or swelling. This is a temporary condition and the medication should not be washed or cleaned out of the eyes.

**Please note that because the application of eye ointment is required by law, there is no opt-out provision. If a parent refuses eye ointment, we have been advised to contact the Department of Social Services, Children's Division.**

# BHC Health Information