

## CANADIAN PAEDIATRIC SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM

# Is screening pregnant women for STIs enough to prevent ophthalmia neonatorum?

When the Canadian Paediatric Society recommended against mandatory ocular prophylaxis for ophthalmia neonatorum, it sparked a debate in the health care community.

Instead of treating all newborns, the CPS recommended improved screening of pregnant women for gonorrhea and chlamydia, which—if untreated—can lead to ophthalmia and other problems. Although ophthalmia neonatorum is rare, if left untreated, infants can experience permanent visual impairment.

Some health professionals are concerned that by focusing only on prevention with topical antibiotics, certain cases of *N gonorrhoeae* and *C trachomatis* will be missed, resulting in more babies with ophthalmia neonatorum.

A new Canadian Paediatric Surveillance Program (CPSP) study hopes to contribute to this debate by providing data about the

minimum incidence rate of ophthalmia neonatorum in Canada.

“Our main goal is to obtain current and specific data on ophthalmia neonatorum affecting infants zero to 28 days of life,” said co-principal investigator, Dr. Andrée-Anne Boisvert, a paediatrician at Université Laval.

This study will fill a knowledge gap, said Dr. Boisvert, since national surveillance on ophthalmia neonatorum was discontinued in 2000. As well, policies on prophylaxis are inconsistent across the country. In some provinces, it is mandatory by law, while in others it is not.

Laws and protocols for mandatory prophylaxis may also change during the surveillance period.

“This study will provide a better understanding of the minimum incidence rate and determine if there is a difference

between jurisdictions where prophylaxis is or isn’t mandatory,” she added.

The study will also focus on determining the effectiveness of prevention efforts targeting pregnant women.

“From surveillance data, we will be able to understand whether there is enough screening during pregnancy at present to decrease the number of ophthalmia neonatorum cases,” said Dr. Boisvert.

Data collected through the study will help to determine the impact of the CPS policy recommendations, Dr. Boisvert said.

“Without data, it’s hard to make a good assessment about what is going on right now across Canada,” she said.

*The study runs from November 2018 to October 2020. For more information, visit [www.cpsp.cps.ca](http://www.cpsp.cps.ca)*

## Go science!

Paediatric infectious diseases specialist Dr. Noni MacDonald of Dalhousie University and Tim Caulfield, Canada Research Chair in Health Law and Policy at University of Alberta, shown here being interviewed by CPAC TV, were part of a panel discussion on vaccine hesitancy hosted by the Senate Open Caucus in Ottawa in April. Both stressed the need for science literacy to combat misinformation and false claims about vaccines: Just 5 to 10 minutes on an anti-vaccine website is enough to change someone’s perception, Dr. MacDonald said. For more info on what you can do, visit our website: [www.cps.ca/en/issues-questions/immunization](http://www.cps.ca/en/issues-questions/immunization)

