



Severe Neonatal Hyperbilirubinaemia OR Exchange Transfusion (Severe Jaundice) Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit Public Information Sheet

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BACKGROUND

Jaundice is very common in newborn babies with about half of all babies having a jaundiced (yellow) appearance between days 3 and 7 of life. In almost all these babies, it gets better by itself or with the help of some phototherapy (lights) and it is not dangerous for the babies but severe jaundice in the newborn period can cause cerebral palsy. This condition is called kernicterus. In addition, the damaging effects of very high levels of jaundice can also lead to deafness. This damage can be prevented if jaundice is recognised early and treated appropriately.

There is concern internationally that the number of babies affected by jaundice in this way may be increasing. Some of the reasons for this increase might be related to a trend towards earlier hospital discharge and in some areas, inadequacy in community monitoring of infants after they leave hospital, as well as lack of education on this issue for parents and care-providers. Currently, there is no accurate data to inform us whether increasing numbers of Australian babies are suffering from this extremely debilitating and potentially preventable condition.

THIS STUDY

We aim to establish the current incidence of severe jaundice in Australia and to document the underlying causes and associated risk factors. To do this, a national study will be conducted using the APSU mechanism which relies on reports from ~1300 paediatricians nationally. Non-identifiable data of newborn babies with very high levels of jaundice will be collected by way of a detailed questionnaire completed by the child's paediatrician. It is anticipated that the data we collect will inform the development of important future prevention strategies such as screening programs and education programs for parents, care-providers and health professionals in our efforts to eradicate this devastating condition.

Further information about Severe Neonatal Hyperbilirubinaemia and Kernicterus:

The Children's Hospital at Westmead http://www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/jaundice_in_babies.htm

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Newborn Care
<http://www.sswahs.nsw.gov.au/rpa/neonatal/>

Raising Children Network
http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/jaundice_of_the_newborn.html

Better Health Victoria http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Jaundice_in_babies

Cerebral Palsy Foundation
<http://www.cpfoundation.com.au>

The Spastic Centre
www.thespasticcentre.org.au