

**Learning Notice: 07/18**  
**Neonatal Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV)**

**Circulation date: 21<sup>st</sup> December 2018**

**Actions required By Whom:** Hospital Group CEOs, Hospital CEOs and Managers, Clinical Directors, Obstetric Clinicians, Neonatal Clinicians and Paediatricians in all Directorates, Acute Hospitals, Maternity Hospitals and Maternity Units, and Directors of Nursing and Midwifery.

**By When:** For **IMMEDIATE ACTION** in Maternity Hospitals and Acute Hospitals with SCBU, NICU, PICU and Maternity Units/Services. Please ensure that this is brought to the attention of all relevant staff.

**Learning:**

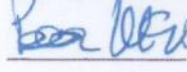
The Dublin City Coroner recommended that neonatal herpes infections should be a notifiable disease and also endorsed the replication of measures taken to reduce risk. The background to this inquest is the death of baby Eibhlín Wills from the herpes simplex virus (HSV). The mother was HSV negative and the infection was acquired in the neonatal period, while the specific source is not known, the verdict of a healthcare acquired infection was given.

Neonatal HSV is a serious disease which is most frequently acquired at delivery of the baby when the mother has the infection. Management of this condition is covered in the Royal College Obstetrician and Gynaecologists (RCOG) guideline "*Management of Genital Herpes in Pregnancy*"<sup>1</sup>. A minority of cases (10%) are acquired postnatally and this specific subset is covered in section 10 of the above guideline.

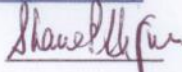
In Ireland the National Virus Reference Laboratory reports that between 2005 and 2017 (900,000 births approx) there were 18 confirmed cases of neonatal herpes of which 3 died. Although the incidence is low the purpose of this learning notice is to highlight that neonatal herpes may be fatal and can be acquired postnatally. Section 10 of the RCOG states:

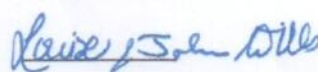
- Advice should be given to the mother regarding possible postnatal infection of HSV
- All those with herpetic lesions in contact with a neonate should practice careful hand hygiene
- All those with oral herpetic lesions (cold sores) should not kiss the neonate

The National Maternity Hospital, where this incident occurred, has responded by increasing patient and staff awareness through visual aids, pamphlets and infection control training. They have also made topical antivirals available to all staff free of charge. We endorse the NMHS response and recommend that these be implemented nationally. Further information on neonatal HSV can be found on [www.rememberingeibhlin.org](http://www.rememberingeibhlin.org).

  
Dr. Peter McKenna

  
Dr. Cilian De Gascun

  
Dr. Shane Higgins

  
The Wills Family

<sup>1</sup> October 2014