Description

International CMV Awareness Month

What is CMV?



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Cytomegalovirus (CMV) is a common virus that belongs to the herpes family of viruses and can infect people of all ages. Most children and adults won't even know that they have it because there are few signs or symptoms and no long-term effects. 80% of people will catch it at some time in their life. However, if a pregnant woman catches CMV and passes it to her unborn baby via the placenta (known as congenital CMV or cCMV) it can pose serious risks to her child. CMV is one of the leading causes of hearing loss in children and one of the main causes of childhood disability.

The majority of babies born with congenital CMV will not have any symptoms at birth and will not suffer any long-term problems. However, two to three babies are adversely impacted by the CMV virus every day in the UK – almost 1,000 babies every year. CMV can cause miscarriages and 5 out of every 1,000 babies born with CMV will die at birth or in their first year of life. Some children are very severely affected leaving them unable to talk, feed, move or make sense of the world around them.

Managing the risks

There is currently no vaccine against CMV but the good news is that the virus is destroyed by soap and water, so ensuring good hygiene such as regular hand washing, and making simple changes where possible, such as not sharing

food, drink and cutlery with small children, and kissing them on the head instead of the lips, can make all the difference. “Don’t share, wash with care”.

Research has shown that the majority of women who contract CMV during pregnancy catch the virus from a toddler or young child. Therefore, mums with a young child or children at home, are more at risk. Currently pregnant women receive no advice about CMV or reducing their risk of infection. Pregnant women are warned of the dangers of toxoplasmosis (from pet litter trays) which affects around 20 babies a year and listeriosis (from soft cheeses) which affects around 30 babies annually.

Petition for newborn screening

This month (June) is International CMV Awareness month. CMV Action, the only UK charity offering advice and support to families affected by congenital CMV, is petitioning the Government to review and fund newborn screening tests for cCMV.

Congenital CMV can be diagnosed shortly after birth by detecting viral DNA in urine or saliva. CMV Action believes screening of all newborn babies is important because:

1. The majority of babies born with cCMV have no symptoms but they can develop them later. Half of hearing loss, due to the CMV virus, can be progressive or late onset. Screening all babies would allow them to be treated and monitored for symptoms caused by the virus, including hearing loss in a timely manner.
2. Diagnosis within the first 21 days is critical to establish that the CMV infection is congenital rather than postnatally acquired. After this time the blood spot test needs to be relied on and this can delay diagnosis.
3. Anti-viral treatment has to be started within the first 28 days of baby’s life in order to be effective. Therefore, delayed diagnosis, waiting for hearing tests or other diagnostic tests, means this window of opportunity can be lost.

The aim of the petition is 10,000 signatures. Please add your name to the petition and share with your colleagues, family and friends.

Please sign the petition here: petition.parliament.uk/petitions/587186

For more information and support visit: www.CMVaction.org.uk

Twitter: cmvaction.org.uk

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