

Patient information factsheet

Congenital cytomegalovirus (CMV) and hearing loss

We have given you this factsheet because your child has been diagnosed with congenital cytomegalovirus (CMV). It explains what congenital CMV is and how it may affect your child's hearing. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our team.

What is cytomegalovirus (CMV)?

CMV is a common virus that is usually harmless. It is similar to the herpes virus that causes cold sores and chickenpox. Like the herpes virus, once you have CMV, it stays in your body for the rest of your life.

Most healthy people with CMV infection have no symptoms (or occasionally mild flu-like symptoms) and aren't aware that they have been infected. However, CMV can be a dangerous infection for susceptible people, such as:

- unborn babies (congenital CMV)
- babies who become infected during birth or shortly afterwards (perinatal CMV)
- people with weakened immune systems, such as those who are having chemotherapy

There are medications that can be used to treat the symptoms of CMV. However, like many viruses, there is not currently a cure.

What is congenital CMV?

When a baby is born with a CMV infection, it is called congenital CMV. Most babies with congenital CMV never show signs or have any health problems. However, some babies have health problems at birth or that develop later, such as hearing loss.

How is CMV spread?

CMV is passed from one person to another through contact with bodily fluids, such as urine, saliva, blood, breast milk and faeces (poo).

Pregnant women can pass an "active" CMV infection on to their unborn baby through their placenta (congenital CMV).

What are the symptoms of congenital CMV?

Most babies (90%) with congenital CMV will have no symptoms as a result of the infection when they are born. However, some babies (10%) will have symptoms at birth, including:

- a rash
- jaundice (a common and usually harmless condition in newborn babies that causes yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes)

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- a low birth weight
- microcephaly (small head)
- seizures
- retinitis (damaged retina in the eye)
- hepatosplenomegaly (enlarged liver and spleen)

Hearing loss and CMV

Hearing loss is common in babies with congenital CMV, and even those without symptoms at birth may develop a hearing loss. Of the 10% of babies with congenital CMV who have symptoms at birth, 75% will have a hearing loss. Half of these babies will experience hearing loss from birth (this will usually be diagnosed via the newborn hearing screen) and the other half will develop their hearing loss later on, usually by the age of three (although it can sometimes be later).

Congenital CMV causes sensorineural hearing loss. This type of hearing loss is permanent and can affect one or both ears. The hearing loss can also be progressive (it could get worse over time). For this reason, it is important that children with congenital CMV have their hearing tested on a regular basis. The earlier we can identify a hearing loss, the sooner we can offer help, such as hearing aids, to ensure that your child has access to all the sounds they need to be able to develop their communication, language, and social skills.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Audiology and hearing therapy department
Level A
The Royal South Hants Hospital
Brintons Terrace
Southampton
Hampshire
SO14 0YG

Telephone: **023 8054 0188**

Email: **UHS.RSHAUDIOLOGY@nhs.net**

Useful links

www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support/childhood-deafness/causes-of-deafness/cytomegalovirus-cmv

www.nationalcmv.org/overview/outcomes

www.nhs.uk/conditions/cytomegalovirus-cmv

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