The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) recently received reports of a shortage of erythromycin (0.5%) ophthalmic ointment, which is the recommended prophylaxis for ophthalmia neonatorum. On September 4, 2009, DHSS issued a Health Advisory, entitled “Shortage of Erythromycin Ophthalmic Ointment for Prophylaxis of Ophthalmia Neonatorum”, which contained guidance from CDC for responding to this situation (http://www.dhss.mo.gov/BT_Response/HAds/HAd9-4-09.pdf).

CDC has now revised their guidance to include not only recommendations for securing supplies of erythromycin ophthalmic ointment, but also recommendations for the use of other ophthalmic solutions or ointments “for extreme situations where erythromycin ophthalmic ointment is not available.” An alternative or additional approach provided in the guidance is to test the mother for gonorrhea and chlamydia prior to delivery in order to identify exposed infants. Empiric treatment is recommended for infants exposed to gonorrhea; monitoring for development of symptoms prior to initiating treatment is recommended for infants exposed to chlamydia. The revised CDC guidance is available at: http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2006/erythromycinOintmentShortage.htm.

Additional changes to this guidance may occur in the future. Providers are strongly encouraged to periodically check CDC’s STD Treatment Guidelines Web site at http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/default.htm for possible further revisions.

Contact the FDA drug shortage e-mail account (drugshortages@fda.hhs.gov) with additional inquiries about the shortage. Questions can also be directed to DHSS’s Bureau of HIV, STD, and Hepatitis at 573/751-6439, or 800/392-0272 (24/7).