

Sunnybrook temporarily closes NICU in response to Staphylococcus Aureus

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There has been an increase in the number of babies in the Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit who have developed infections with a bacterium called staphylococcus aureus and as a precautionary measure Sunnybrook has temporarily closed the High Risk Perinatal Service to maternal transfers and direct newborn admissions to allow for intensive cleaning of the area.

Sunnybrook is continuing to care for the admitted patients in the NICU and has created a separate area to accommodate new babies that might need the NICU. Sunnybrook is working with the Child Health Network and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care to ensure babies will receive care.

This bacterium is quite common and it is normal to find it on the skin of newborns within about a week of birth. Babies can get this from anyone who comes in close contact with them. Most full term babies who have staphylococcus aureus live with it peacefully however, the organism that has surfaced in the NICU has caused a variety of infections to the skin and eyes for example. The babies in the NICU are responding to antibiotic treatment.

Outbreaks in the NICU are quite rare and several measures have been put in place to keep this bacterium from spreading such as isolating babies who have symptoms and ensuring they are cared for by a team of clinicians who will only treat this group of patients. Infection prevention precautions such as gowns, gloves and masks for staff and visitors have also been put in place to minimize the risk of spreading the bacterium.

Sunnybrook's High Risk Perinatal Service will remain closed until there are no new transmissions of the staphylococcus aureus bacterium.

Sunnybrook's Perinatal and Gynaecology program handles around 4,000 births a year about 25 per cent of which are high-risk pregnancies. The Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit cares for one in five of all babies born in Ontario weighing less than three pounds. Construction on a new unit is set to begin in April and will be ready for occupancy by 2010.

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