



**For Immediate Release:**

Tuesday, July 2, 2013

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## **News Release**

### **Utah Babies to Benefit from Education, Screening for Congenital Cytomegalovirus**

(Salt Lake City, UT) – This week Utah becomes the first state in the nation to launch an education and screening campaign for cytomegalovirus, commonly referred to as CMV.

CMV, a member of the herpes family of viruses, is a common virus that infects people of all ages. Most healthy children and adults with CMV don't feel sick and don't know they have been infected; others may have mild, flu-like symptoms such as fever, sore throat, fatigue or swollen glands.

Harper Randall, M.D., Medical Director, Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Division of Family Health and Preparedness, says, "Most CMV infections are 'silent', meaning the majority of people who have it have no signs or symptoms, and there are no harmful effects. However, when CMV occurs during a woman's pregnancy, the baby can become infected before birth. It's then known congenital CMV."

An average of 365 babies – or one per day – is born with CMV in Utah each year. When this happens, the virus is transmitted to the unborn infant and can potentially affect the brain, eyes and/or inner ears. About 1 of every 5 children born with congenital CMV infection will develop permanent problems, such as hearing loss or developmental disabilities.

In an effort to make moms-to-be aware of CMV, Rep. Ronda Menlove, R-Garland, submitted and succeeded in passing H.B. 81, which directs UDOH to educate women about the dangers of CMV in pregnancy, and more importantly, how to prevent it.

The virus is generally passed from infected people to others through direct contact with body fluids like urine and saliva. An infected person can look healthy and still pass the virus to another person for a period of several months after being infected.

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Richard Harward, Au.D., Director, UDOH Children with Special Health Care Needs Bureau, says one of the best prevention strategies is the easiest. “Good personal hygiene is key and includes washing hands often with soap and water for 15 to 20 seconds, especially after changing diapers, feeding a young child, wiping a young child’s nose or mouth, or after handling children’s toys.” Harward also says pregnant women should not share food, drinks, eating utensils or a toothbrush with a child, and not put a child’s pacifier in her mouth.

In addition to cytomegalovirus (CMV) public education, H.B. 81 requires medical practitioners to test newborns for congenital CMV before 21 days of age if they have failed two hearing screenings.

Utah has been screening newborns for hearing loss in the first few days of life since 1998. Stephanie McVicar, Au.D., Director, UDOH Early Hearing Detection and Intervention, says congenital CMV is one of the leading causes of hearing loss in children. McVicar stresses the importance of timely newborn hearing screening follow-up. “If a baby fails the hearing screening in the hospital, it’s very important that the child be re-screened before 14 days of age. If the baby then does not pass this second screening, their medical provider will talk to the family about congenital CMV testing.”

If a baby tests positive, appropriate referrals will be made to other specialists as needed. Harward says hearing loss and overall development should be monitored closely, and Randall adds that infants, children, and adults who are infected with CMV *after* birth rarely have problems. “Our education effort is about preventing CMV infection during pregnancy, when it could present a danger to the unborn child,” said Randall.

More information on CMV is available through the MotherToBaby Utah hotline at (800) 822-2229 or by visiting <http://www.health.utah.gov/cshcn/CHSS/CMV.html>.

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