Newborn Jaundice/Phototheray

Jaundice refers to yellow coloring caused by excess amounts of bilirubin in the body. Babies are especially prone to jaundice in the first week of life. Jaundice is common in newborns and is usually harmless. If the bilirubin level becomes too high, it needs to be treated to prevent serious complications.

Treatment:

Newborn jaundice is treated by exposing the baby's skin to special lights called phototherapy, or bililights. Bililights come in different types – bright spot lights, multiple fluorescent white and/or blue lights, and tiny bright lights in a pad that the baby lies on (called a bili-blanket or Wallaby). When your baby is being treated with phototherapy, these are things to pay special attention to:

- Expose as much of the baby's skin to the light as possible. Remove all clothing, including diaper. If necessary to prevent soiling the bedding, a small size diaper may be used to cover as little of the body as possible.
- Make sure your baby's eyes are covered any time the bililight is turned on. Check to make sure that the eye covering is not put on too tightly and causing pressure on the eyes. You can remove the eye covers for 15 to 20 minutes every 3 to 4 hours. Be sure to turn the bililight off first. Then feed or provide other care to your baby. If using a bili-blanket (Wallaby), you can wrap the bili-blanket in another blanket around your baby and leave it turned on while holding him for feedings.
- Phototherapy can make your baby sleepier than usual and less eager to eat. To prevent dehydration, be sure your baby drinks enough fluids. Wake your baby for feedings at least every 3 to 4 hours. Some babies need an IV to get enough fluids while being treated with phototherapy.
- Check your baby's temperature every 3 to 4 hours. The lights can cause him to overheat.
- Babies receiving phototherapy may have frequent dark green or black, tarry, or watery stools as the bilirubin is being removed from the body. Be sure to keep your baby's skin clean, especially in the diaper area.
- Do not put lotions, creams, or powders on your baby's skin while he is getting phototherapy.
- Blood work will be drawn to check your baby's bilirubin level.

Call your baby's doctor, home care nurse, or the Children's Mercy Hospital Information Line at (816) 234-3188 if you are providing phototherapy at home and you notice any of the following:

- Your baby has a fever greater than 101°F (38.3°C).
- Your baby will not eat or eats very little for 2 feedings in a row.
- Your baby has not had a wet diaper in 8 hours.
- Your baby's jaundice appears worse.
- The inside of your baby's mouth is dry and his fontanel (soft spot on top of the head) is sunken in.
- You have questions or concerns.