

Health Bulletin



Advances In Preventing Blindness In Babies

(NAPSA)—Here's eye-opening news: Scientists have confirmed a way to reduce the risk of blindness in premature infants.

Through an eye exam, doctors can identify which infants are most likely to benefit from early treatment for a potentially blinding eye condition called retinopathy of prematurity (ROP).

This disease is one of the most common causes of vision loss in children. It occurs in preterm babies because the blood vessels in their eyes have not had a chance to develop properly.

The research, published in *Archives of Ophthalmology*, was supported by the National Eye Institute (NEI), part of the National Institutes of Health.

"This study has set the standard of care for infants with ROP by showing that early treatment of selected high-risk premature babies has positive longer-term results on vision," said NEI Director Paul A. Sieving, M.D., Ph.D.

An estimated 15,000 premature infants born each year in the United States are affected by some degree of ROP.

"The long-term study has given clinicians evidence that infants with ROP should be treated with different strategies based on risk, which can be determined through an exam at the bedside," said



Doctors have confirmed a way to tell which premature infants should receive treatment to prevent blindness.

study chair William V. Good, M.D., of Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute in San Francisco.

The study found that doctors could predict which infants were more likely to benefit from early treatment by identifying certain eye characteristics, such as the appearance and location of the blood vessels.

The National Eye Institute leads the federal government's research on the visual system and eye diseases. NEI supports basic and clinical science programs that result in the development of sight-saving treatments.

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