

Child Injury Laws *Blog*

Left Untreated, Newborn Jaundice May Result In Hyperbilirubemia

Posted by [Jonathan Rosenfeld](#) on November 22, 2010

As a parent, I can't think of anything more horrific than a life-long disability facing a young child. As a lawyer who represents families faced with the difficult task of caring for a disabled child, I really get angered when the disability is caused by the carelessness of others.

Unlike, many types of medical malpractice that involve extremely complex medical issues that can be frankly difficult for any person without medical training to comprehend, jaundice (or more accurately neonatal hyperbilirubinemia) is a relatively straight-forward medical complication that can have devastating consequences for newborns when left undiagnosed or improperly treated.

Bilirubin is a waste product that is left behind when red blood cells break down is a natural part of human life. In the case of some newborns with jaundice (yellow coloring of the skin and eyes), the underlying cause may be a heighten bilirubin levels-- called hyperbilirubinemia.

In addition to the visible skin and eye discoloration, hyperbilirubinemia may also be diagnosed with blood tests to determine if the bilirubin levels are problematic. Once diagnosed, newborn hyperbilirubinemia can usually be treated with relatively simple phototherapy-- light therapy.

When elevated bilirubin levels achieve a certain level and go untreated or undiagnosed by physicians, the toxicity can result in kernicterus-- brain damage. Newborns with kernicterus face a lifetime of permanent medical problems including:

- Spasticity

Jonathan Rosenfeld offers legal services relating to: birth injuries, medical malpractice, day care abuse, foster care abuse, swimming pool injuries, automobile accidents, school bus accidents, dog bites, food poisoning, product liability, amusement park accidents and clergy abuse. For more information please visit Child Injury Laws Blog (<http://www.childinjurylaws.com/>) or call Jonathan directly at (888) 424-5757.

- Hearing problems
- Vision problems
- Dental complications
- Cerebral palsy

In many of hyperbilirubinemia cases, a case may be pursued against the physician or hospital that failed to diagnose and treat the newborn's elevated bilirubin levels. A claim may include recovery of money damages for a lifetime of medical care as well as the pain and other intangible losses where permitted by law.

Given the severity of these cases and the impact that caring for a disabled child has on the entire family, these cases certainly merit a timely and thorough investigation by medical and legal professionals to help evaluate all feasible causes of action.

Resources:

Newborn Jaundice Medline Plus U.S. Library of Medicine, NIH National Institute of Health

Hyperbilirubinemia in the Term Newborn MEREDITH L. PORTER, CPT, MC, USA, and BETH L. DENNIS, MAJ, MC, USA, Dewitt Army Community Hospital, Fort Belvoir, Virginia Am Fam Physician. 2002 Feb 15;65(4):599-607

Jaundice and Hyperbilirubinemia in the Newborn, PEDIATRICS, KARINA LUISE GLASER, MD

Treatment of jaundice in low birthweight infants (PDF) Arch Dis Child Fetal Neonatal Ed. 2003 November; 88(6): F459-F463 by M Maisels and J Watchko