



November 9, 2023

Subject: Erythromycin 0.5% Ophthalmic Ointment Shortage Update and Guidance

Dear Healthcare Providers,

Due to an ongoing shortage of **erythromycin 0.5% ophthalmic ointment** (erythromycin), the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is providing recommendations to assist healthcare providers experiencing strained supplies.

Erythromycin 0.5% ophthalmic ointment is the recommended regimen to prevent ophthalmia neonatorum caused by *N. gonorrhoeae*. [Texas Health and Safety Code 81.091](#) requires providers to administer gonorrhea ocular prophylaxis of newborns in accordance with DSHS guidance (see also [Texas Administrative Code 97.136](#)).

Healthcare providers may consider the following recommendations until erythromycin supply concerns are resolved. Erythromycin continues to be the best regimen to prevent ophthalmia neonatorum.

**Recommendations for Healthcare Providers:**

- **Follow [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) guidance if supply is exhausted:** If erythromycin ointment is unavailable, infants at risk for exposure to *N. gonorrhoeae*, especially those born to a mother at risk for gonococcal infection or with no prenatal care, may be administered ceftriaxone 25–50 mg/kg body weight IV or IM, not to exceed 250 mg in a single dose.

Other topical medications are not recommended: tetracycline ophthalmic ointment and silver nitrate are no longer available in the United States; gentamicin was associated with chemical conjunctivitis during a previous erythromycin shortage; and povidone-iodine has limited data on its risks and benefits. Additional treatment guidance is available in the [CDC's STI Treatment Guidelines, 2021](#).

- **Communicate with patients:** Proactively communicate with patients about the shortage and provide clear guidance on the available treatment options.
- **Report shortage effects to DSHS:** Healthcare providers should report the adverse effects of the erythromycin shortage. Notify DSHS at [hivstd@dshs.texas.gov](mailto:hivstd@dshs.texas.gov) of any shortage of this product so DSHS can provide situational awareness to CDC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

- **Stay updated:** Stay informed about updates or changes to the erythromycin shortage through reliable sources like [DSHS](#), [FDA](#), [CDC](#), local health departments, and professional healthcare associations. Regularly check for new information and promptly disseminate updates to your healthcare team.

### **Federal Efforts to Address the Shortage:**

To address the current erythromycin shortage, FDA has worked with Fera Pharmaceuticals, LLC on the temporary importation of non-FDA approved products from Canada.

- Effective immediately, and during this temporary period, Fera will distribute erythromycin, 5mg/g (NDC 48102-057-11).
- The strength and qualitative composition of the imported drug product are the same as the FDA-approved drug product.
- Both products meet the U.S. monograph specifications.
- Additional details and comparison of the FDA-approved versus Fera Canada-approved product can be found at the FDA website, [Fera Dear Healthcare Provider Letter | Erythromycin \(fda.gov\)](#).

Providers can work through their established procurement channels to obtain additional supply erythromycin. Providers may also contact Fera for more options at 516-277-1449.

The most current information on the shortage can be found at the [FDA Drug Shortages](#) website.

### **Resources:**

- [HIV/STD Program | Texas DSHS](#)
- [FDA Drug Shortages: Erythromycin](#)
- [CDC - STD Treatment - Drug notices](#)
- [CDC's STI Treatment Guidelines, 2021](#)

DSHS is closely monitoring the erythromycin shortage and will provide updates as they become available. Thank you for your partnership in ensuring health and well-being of all Texans. For further questions or concerns regarding the erythromycin shortage, please contact DSHS at [hivstd@dshs.texas.gov](mailto:hivstd@dshs.texas.gov).

Sincerely,

Joshua Hutchison

Associate Commissioner, Infectious Disease Prevention Division

Texas Department of State Health Services