



RETINOPATHY *of* PREMATURITY

Contributed by Samuel C. Gold, M.D.

Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) is a sight threatening condition that effects the retina of premature infants as a result of incomplete development of the blood vessels within the eye. While retinal blood vessels usually finish developing by the time of birth, premature infants may be born before this occurs. Improperly developed retinal blood vessels may be exposed to high levels of oxygen, which can in turn lead to abnormal blood vessel growth on the surface of the retina. This proliferation of abnormal blood vessels can lead to retinal detachment and vision loss.

ROP is one of the most common causes of childhood vision loss and occurs most often in infants who weigh less than three pounds or who are born before the 31st week of pregnancy. If diagnosed, frequent monitoring is required to determine if the condition will regress on its own or require treatment to reduce the risk of vision loss.

In its early stages ROP does not require any treatment. As the condition advances, laser surgery is usually effective in reversing the growth of abnormal blood vessels and preventing the retina from detaching. The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Elliot Hospital is the only NICU in Southern New Hampshire to offer laser surgery for ROP. This means babies from New Hampshire can be treated locally in Manchester rather than referred to Boston for treatment.



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