

Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP)

is an eye disorder caused by abnormal growth of blood vessels in the light sensitive part of the eye called the retina.

Premature babies are at higher risk of vision complications. Here's why:



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Baby's eyes have less time to develop in the womb.

During the last 12 weeks of pregnancy, the eyes develop very rapidly, especially the blood vessels in the retina. **When babies are born prematurely the growth of these retinal blood vessels can become abnormal leading to ROP.**

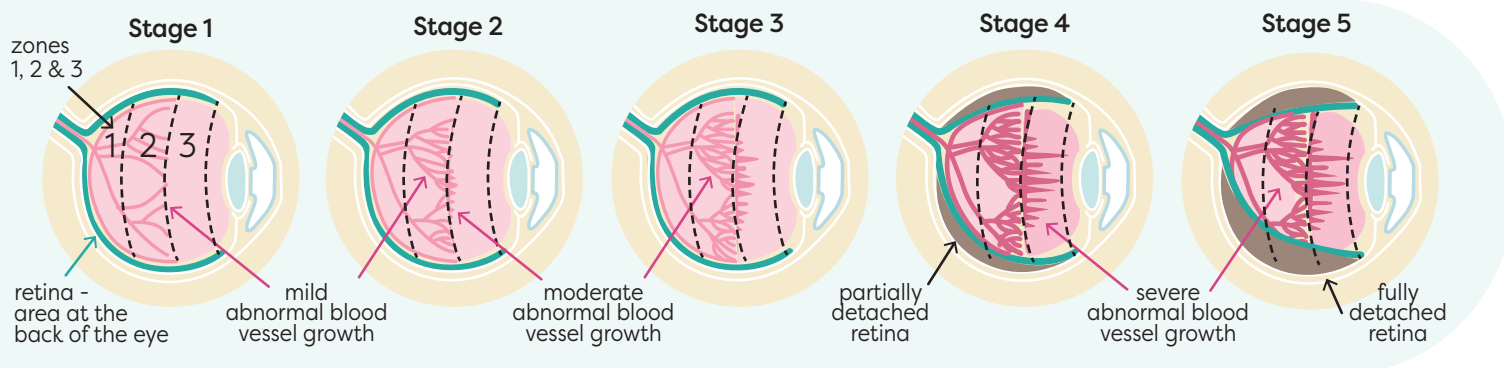
Babies at higher risk (due to gestational age, weight at birth, or illness) receive **regular ROP eye exams with an ophthalmologist** (eye doctor) in the NICU starting 4 to 6 weeks after birth until the retina is fully developed.

Understanding ROP

Your baby's eye doctor will use the terms 'zone' and 'stage'. **Zone** explains how far the blood vessels have grown on the retina. Blood vessels go from zone 1 to 3 as they grow. The **stage** explains the level of abnormal blood vessel growth from mildly abnormal to severely abnormal growth causing part or all of the retina to detach (pull out of place), requiring treatment.

In most mild to moderate cases, blood vessels in the retina go back to normal and cause no damage.

The doctor will discuss laser therapy, antibody treatment, or in rare cases surgery, if needed.



What can I expect at the exam?

Your baby's eyes are dilated with eye drops and the doctor will examine the retina with a special instrument. Because your baby needs to be held tightly and eyes kept wide open, this procedure can be uncomfortable for both parents and babies.

Ask your baby's nurse about this exam and ways to comfort your baby before, during and after.

All babies need regular eye check ups. In addition to ROP, babies are still at risk for refractive errors like short sightedness or strabismus (crossed eyes). **Be sure to go to all of your baby's eye appointments to ensure healthy vision.**



Visit us online for ROP resources, plus other useful resources and programs focused on premature babies and their families.

CPBF Canadian Premature Babies Foundation

canadianpremies.org

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