

INAPPROPRIATE USE OF CHLOHEXIDINE SOLUTION FOR EYE CARE IN NEWBORN CHILDREN

Dear All

Chlorhexidine (CHX) digluconate 7.1% equivalent to 4% Chlorhexidine gel is one of the thirteen UN Life Saving Commodities recognized by WHO as a suitable antimicrobial agent for preventing umbilical cord infection in newborns. The WHO Essential Medicines List has included 4% Chlorhexidine gel for umbilical cord care and Nigeria is finalizing the process of its inclusion in its National Essential Medicine List and Standard Treatment Guidelines.

The Government of Nigeria's policy on the use of 4% Chlorhexidine gel is multiple applications from a 25 gram tube, to be applied within 2 hours of birth, then once daily till cord stump falls off or the gel finishes.

It has come to our attention that Chlorhexidine solution was inappropriately instilled into the eyes of newborns in some states in the North East and North West. This was as a result of its packaging in a bottle resembling an eye drop, as part of a birth kit distributed to mothers in some states of the federation.

The inappropriate use in eye care instead of cord care has resulted in corneal ulceration leading to irreversible blindness. So far, five cases have been reported.

In response to this emergency, the Federal Ministry of Health in conjunction with the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA) convened a meeting of key stakeholders (NAFDAC, UNICEF, WHO, USAID, TSHIP, CHAI, Save the Children, MCSP) to discuss the problem, identify the cause and manage the impact.

At the meeting, the following recommendations were made for immediate action by the State Ministries of Health and Primary Health Care Development Agencies/Boards.

- [Withdrawal and recall of all inappropriately packaged Chlorhexidine solution for cord care from households, communities and health facilities](#)
- Replacement of Chlorhexidine solution in facilities with 4% Chlorhexidine gel
- States to intensify mass mobilization on the appropriate use of 4% Chlorhexidine gel for cord care using the IEC materials already developed by Federal Ministry of Health
- States to train frontline health workers on the appropriate use of 4% for cord care to prevent infections in newborns
- States are requested to ensure dedicated procurement of 4% Chlorhexidine gel from certified local manufacturer in line with National Policy

We are counting on your state to implement the recommendations made above to contain the emergency and prevent a reoccurrence. Kindly share this information with other esteemed Partners.

Please accept the assurance of our partnership for service.

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