

How is Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) Diagnosed and Treated? – Information for Parents



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Part 2 of 3 in a series

PreventBlindness.org/retinopathy-of-prematurity-rop

Read Next: “What Do I Need to Know About My Child’s ROP and Lifelong Vision Health?”

How is ROP diagnosed?

A ROP eye exam by an ophthalmologist is needed if your baby:

- Was born earlier than or equal to 30 weeks
- Was less than or equal to 1,500 grams at birth
- Has other high-risk factors

What happens during the exam?

- Numbing drops are placed on the eye to decrease pain
- Eye drops are placed to widen the **pupils** (dilation)
- Instruments will keep the eye open and in position
- The doctor will use lenses and a headlamp to look inside the eye at the **retina** to see where and how much of the retina may have abnormal vessels (retinopathy)

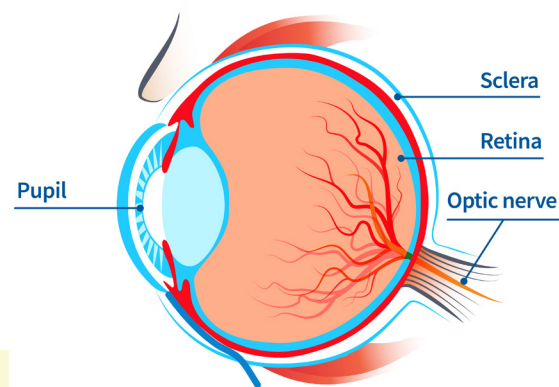
What to know about the ROP exam:

- It is critical to protecting your baby’s vision and eye health.
- It can be uncomfortable for your baby but should only last a few minutes.
- The dilating eye drops can sometimes make your baby sensitive to light and more irritable.
- Your baby’s NICU team will help your baby be as comfortable as possible.
- All babies in the NICU will need to be checked every 1-3 weeks, as determined by the ophthalmologist.

All children diagnosed with ROP, even if they didn’t need treatment, should continue to see an ophthalmologist regularly. Follow all recommended appointments at least once a year. This will help to monitor for any other vision problems.

What is retinopathy of prematurity (ROP)?

ROP happens more often in babies born early or small because the blood vessels of the retina do not completely form during pregnancy. With ROP, blood vessels in the eye grow abnormally and spread on the retina. The retina is a thin layer of cells in the back of the eye that acts like the film in the camera of the eye to help you see.



Ophthalmologist (of-thuhl-MOL-uh-jist): a medical doctor who specializes in caring for eyes.



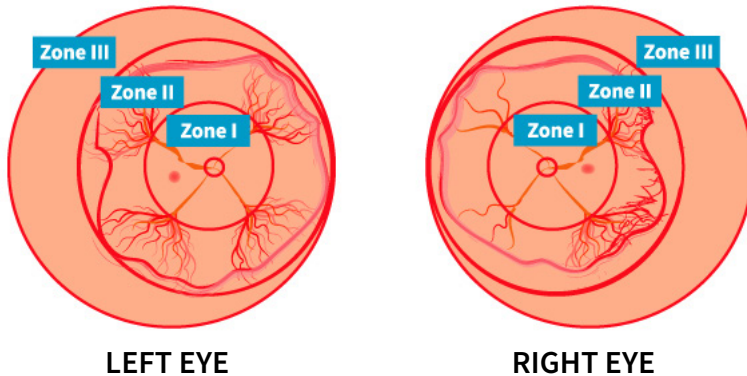
“We all have similar experiences about our journeys with our children, and I think it’s important that families continue to hear those experiences, and that they know that they are not alone.”

–Nicole, Parent of Child with ROP & Family and Professional Training Director, SPAN Parent Advocacy Network

Understanding My Baby's ROP Diagnosis

The ophthalmologist will use these terms to describe your baby's ROP.

- The zone describes the location in the eye where the abnormal blood vessels are growing. There are 3 zones.
- The stage describes the seriousness of ROP. There are 5 stages.
- Plus disease describes cases of ROP where the blood vessels around the retina are significantly wider or more twisted than normal.



How is ROP treated?

- Approximately 10% of ROP cases will be serious enough to need treatment to prevent permanent vision loss or blindness.
- Treatments for ROP include:
 - **Injection of medication into the eye:** A shot given into the baby's eyes to help block the growth of abnormal blood vessels.
 - **Laser therapy:** The heat from lasers burns the outer area of the retina to stop new, abnormal blood vessels from growing.
 - **Cryotherapy** (kry-oh-THER-uh-pee): Part of the retina is frozen to stop abnormal blood vessels from growing.
- Advanced ROP may require eye surgery, such as Scleral (SKLEER-uhl) buckle surgery or Vitrectomy (vi-TREK-tuh-mee) to prevent the worsening of the retinal detachment.

What follow up is needed for ROP?

- It is very important that you keep all scheduled follow-up appointments your doctor recommends once you take your baby home. Lifelong eye exams may be needed.
- All children diagnosed with ROP, even if they didn't need treatment or their ROP is described as "resolved", should continue to see an ophthalmologist regularly.

Find more information on ROP, support for families of children in the NICU, and Early Intervention at:

<https://preventblindness.org/family-resources-retinopathy-of-prematurity-rop>

Questions to ask the doctor:

You are a big part of your child's care team. Here are some questions that might be helpful to ask when talking with the ophthalmologist:

- What is my child able to see?
- Will my child require medical treatment?
- Does the treatment have any complications?
- What are the chances that my child could go blind from ROP?
- How likely is it that my child's ROP will return after treatment?
- How frequently do I need to bring my child in for follow-up eye examinations?
- How will my child's vision be affected in the future?



Scan the QR code with your smartphone's camera to learn more about ROP.

This information developed in partnership with

