



Comanche County  
Health Department

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## **Prevent to Protect: Prevent Infections for Baby's Protection**

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month and the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) is working closely with the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) to raise awareness of infections, like Cytomegalovirus (CMV), that may cause birth defects.

CMV is a common virus that infects people of all ages. More than half of adults have been infected with CMV by age 40. Most people infected with CMV do not become ill from the virus, but if a pregnant woman is exposed to the virus for the first time during her pregnancy she may spread the virus to her unborn baby.

When a baby is born with CMV infection, it is called congenital CMV. About one out of every 150 babies is born with congenital CMV infection and most babies with congenital CMV infection never show signs or have health problems. One in five babies, however, will have long-term health problems such as hearing loss, vision loss, intellectual disability, small head size, lack of coordination, cerebral palsy, seizures, and weakness or problems using muscles.

One such child is Parker, who was born with signs of CMV infection at birth. He had severe bruising, blood spots from the top of his head to his toes, cerebral palsy, and an enlarged liver and spleen. Parker spent nine days in the NICU where he was diagnosed with congenital CMV infection. As a result of the infection, Parker has had numerous surgeries to correct his vision and to improve his hearing. Today, Parker is thriving with the help of physical, occupational and speech therapies and a structured environment. He is a happy and healthy three-year-old who loves Toy Story, Mickey Mouse, singing, dancing and his big sister.

Pregnant women are most likely to get CMV from young children. CMV is passed from young children to pregnant women through urine or saliva during diaper changes, sharing of eating utensils or exchanging saliva when kissing. The NBDPN warns pregnant women against putting a young child's food, utensils, drinking cups or pacifiers in their mouth to reduce their exposure to CMV. Regular hand washing is one of the best ways to remove germs and prevent the spread of germs to others.

OSDH continues to work with healthcare professionals, birthing hospitals, and advocate groups around the state to raise awareness of infections that can cause birth defects.

Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/cmV/index.html> for more information.

