VANCOUVER, B.C. — Postnatally acquired cytomegalovirus infection can cause severe illness in very low-birth-weight infants in the short term, based on findings from a retrospective study.

Infants in the study who became infected and symptomatic with cytomegalovirus (CMV) infection in the postnatal period had high rates of complications. In fact, their clinical and laboratory findings were similar to those of congenitally infected infants.

“The biggest take-home message is that postnatal CMV infection can cause significant morbidity, and it can potentially lead to [poor] long-term outcomes,” lead investigator Dr. Sarah A. Meyer said in an interview.

“It is often something that we don’t think about a lot, and we just need to keep it in our mind that if we have babies that present with some of these symptoms, we should be testing them and following their outcomes,” she said.

Much is known about congenitally acquired CMV, according to Dr. Meyer of Children’s Hospital in Aurora, Colo. He noted that congenital CMV infection in the postnatal period through breast milk.

He added that many healthcare providers are uncomfortable caring for these infants, but that it is important to support them. “They are comfortable caring for these infants, but they are uncomfortable caring for them,” he said.

“An area of study that is still really needed is to look at how treating babies with antivirals affects their outcomes,” he explained.