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by **Audrey Dutton**
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Bill would shed light on virus that can cause birth defects

Rebekah Ponsford Hall contracted a virus when she was pregnant and is now on a mission to educate other Idaho women about it. The Idaho Legislature is considering a bill to do just that.

Hall had a cytomegalovirus infection that caused her daughter, Keira, to be born with multiple severe disabilities.

“I have since learned that though CMV is more common than Down syndrome, spina bifida and fetal-alcohol syndrome, only 9 percent of women in the U.S. have ever heard of it,” said Hall, who lives in Nampa. “I want to raise awareness that CMV is common, severe and preventable.”

About one out of every 150 babies is born with a congenital CMV infection, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About 20 percent of those babies get sick or have long-term health problems, which can be severe, the CDC says.

The virus is common, and healthy people often have no symptoms.

Hall hopes legislation will increase awareness by requiring the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare to disseminate information to health care providers, child care providers, schools, religious organizations that offer children’s programs, and the public about transmission, prevention, how common it is and the birth defects it can cause.

The education program would cost an estimated \$15,000 a year to implement but would save the state “millions of dollars in the care and treatment of various disabilities that are associated with congenital CMV infection,” according to the bill’s fiscal note.

The bill, S1060, passed the Senate last week by a 31-3 vote and passed the House Health and Welfare Committee on Monday.

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