

## WARNING

### MISREADING OF HEAD CIRCUMFERENCE SCALE ON UK-WHO NEONATAL AND INFANT CLOSE MONITORING (NICM) CHART IN BABIES WITH VERY LARGE HEADS

A clinical error associated with plotting head circumference on the UK-WHO NICM chart has been reported. In a child whose head circumference already exceeded the 99.6<sup>th</sup> centile at term, the left hand length scale was misread as the head circumference scale, leading to avoidable delay in recognition of intra cranial expansion.

On the 2-weeks to 6-months chart, in order to accommodate both head and length curves, the head circumference scale on the left hand axis extends only to 39cm, though on the right axis it extends to 47cm. The left axis then continues as the length scale in a different colour from 42cm and upwards in 2cm intervals (see figure). If that distinction is not recognised, the incorrectly plotted head circumference can then appear to be tracking within the normal range (see figure).

It is thus important that staff plotting head circumference in children under 3 months, with heads greater than 39 cm are aware of the need to read from the right hand scale, not the left.

The RCPCH are developing a new edition of the chart in which the labeling will be modified to reduce the risk of confusion. However staffs using existing stock need to be aware of the potential for confusion.

