

Infection prevention and hand washing in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)

This leaflet aims to provide information on the importance of infection control measures in our unit and explain how we aim to reduce the spread of bacteria.

Our goal is to keep your baby safe by preventing infections in every possible way, and **you play an important part** in this.

Why infection prevention matters?

- Babies on the neonatal unit are especially vulnerable to infection because they may be born early (premature), have low birth weight, or need extra medical care, and these factors can increase their risk of picking up an infection.
- We make every effort to follow strict infection prevention practices to help keep your baby safe and to reduce the spread of infection.
- As part of our infection prevention practices in the unit, we regularly check for different types of bacteria that may be present on your baby's skin. This helps us identify any bacteria early, even if your baby is not showing any signs of infection.

What is colonisation and how do we monitor for bacteria?

- Colonisation means that a group of bacteria are present on the skin or in the body without causing any signs of infection or illness.
- In the neonatal unit, some babies can become colonised with certain bacteria. This doesn't mean they are sick, but it does mean extra care is needed to prevent the spread to others.
- To help monitor this, we do a screening swab when your baby is admitted and routinely do **weekly skin screening swabs** on Sunday nights. These are quick and gentle swabs taken from your baby's nose, groin and bottom, and they do not cause any discomfort or pain to your baby.

What happens if my baby is found to be colonised?

If we get results from the weekly swabs showing that your baby has a colonisation:

- We will inform you about the results and answer any questions.

- We may place your baby in isolation, which means they will be cared for in a separate room. This helps prevent the spread of bacteria to other babies in the unit.
- We will continue their regular care and treatment.
- Most babies who have colonised bacteria on their swabs do **not** get sick and will not require any extra treatment. However, we will keep a close eye on your baby and treat any signs of infection straight away.

What can I do to help?

Follow good hand hygiene practices

- One of the most important ways to protect your baby is good hand hygiene.
- Always clean your hands with soap and warm running water before and after touching your baby or their environment. There is further information on this outlined in our handwashing guide at the wash basins.
- Encourage all visitors to wash their hands.
- There is always alcohol hand gel available at your baby's cot side.

Hand hygiene technique



Palm to palm



Right palm over left dorsum
and left palm over right dorsum



Palm to palm
fingers interlaced



Backs of fingers to opposing palms with
fingers interlocked



Rotational rubbing of right thumb
clasped in left palm and vice versa



Rotational rubbing, backwards and
forwards with clasped fingers of right
hand in left palm and vice versa

Finish by cleaning wrists

General measures

When entering the unit

- Remove all outdoor jackets, coats, cardigans, etc. and hang them up on the racks provided.
- Remove all watches, bracelets and rings, and roll up your sleeves above your elbows. Plain wedding bands without stones or holes may be left on.
- Please keep your fingernails short and avoid wearing artificial nails.
- If you, or any visitor with you, are feeling unwell (such as a cough, cold or fever), please do not visit the unit until you are feeling better.

When in the unit

- Wear protective clothing if asked by staff - this might sometimes be required if your baby is in isolation.
- Try to limit the number of visitors to your baby. In winter there may be restrictions on visitors due to an increase in respiratory illnesses.
- Follow staff advice about holding, feeding, and caring for your baby during isolation.
- Keep all personal items clean and off the floor.
- Wipe down the breast pumps in the expressing room before and after use with the wipes provided.
- Remember to clean and sterilise equipment such as expressing kits, using the facilities provided.
- If your baby is in isolation, clean and sterilise these items at home to use for the following day in the unit.
- Do not leave soft toys in the incubators or cots.
- If you have food items, please label these before placing them in the fridge in the parents' room.

When leaving the unit

- Take your baby's clothes home to wash regularly and remember to bring some clean items for the next day.
- Remember to wash your hands.

Contact NICU

If you have any questions, please call us on 020 7288 5530.

Contact our Trust

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on **020 7288 5551** or whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net.

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet, please email whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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