

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU): A guide for parents and families



Congratulations on your new bundle (or bundles) of joy!

The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Sault Area Hospital provides service to infants requiring critical, intermediate or transitional care.

Specialized care is provided for newborns in our unit by our specialized team, consisting of paediatricians, nurses, respiratory therapists, social workers, registered dietitians, pharmacists and spiritual care workers.

As a parent in the NICU you are the most important person for your baby.

- You are your baby's voice, your baby's source of comfort, warmth and affection, your baby's advocate, and the most vital member of your baby's care team.
- We want you to be with your baby as much as possible, and we are here to help you in any way that we can.
- We want you to take part in your baby's care and we will give you the needed information, teaching and support.

This book is written as a guide for you during your baby's stay in NICU.

- If you have any questions or concerns, please ask any member of your baby's healthcare team.
- Our team is here to support you and your family.
- This booklet was created with nurses from the Women and Children's Health Department and Algoma Public Health. Information was also included from the Canadian Pediatric Society and various hospital booklets throughout.

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What to Expect in the NICU

The birth of your baby is a joyful event, but when your baby comes to the NICU you may feel a whirlwind of emotions. This is normal. The NICU staff is available for help and support so please ask questions if you have any!

Why are babies admitted to the NICU?

Babies may be admitted to the NICU for many reasons, including:

- prematurity – born before 37 weeks of pregnancy
- breathing problems
- health problems such as low sugar levels, infection or jaundice
- a health condition that requires transfer to a different hospital

The care your baby receives in the NICU is based on your baby's needs. Your baby's health care team will help you learn about your baby's condition and care.

When can I spend time with my baby?

As a parent, spending time with your baby will help them thrive. We want you to spend as much time with them as possible so all parents are welcome 24 hours a day. However **visiting is restricted** during report time (6:45-7:15 am/pm) due to confidentiality.

When babies must remain in hospital longer than the mother, the nursing staff will arrange for an appropriate place for you to stay overnight. This is very important for bonding and establishing feeding with your baby,

What do I do when I get to the NICU?

The NICU is located on 1A within Sault Area Hospital's Women and Children's Health Program. The unit is secure and locked so you will need to press a buzzer to be allowed onto the unit and then again into the NICU. If your baby is in the NICU remember to keep your identification bracelet that is given to you at birth. This is how nursing staff will identify you.

When you enter the NICU you must **CLEAN YOUR HANDS** first at the sink available upon entry. For the rest of your visit, you may wash your hands with soap and water, or use the alcohol-based rub (if your hands are not visibly dirty). This is especially important to do:

- before and after touching your baby
- before and after touching an object or surface, and
- before leaving the NICU



Who can visit my baby?

For safety we ask that only 2 people visit at baby's bedside at one time, not including a parent. The only children that can visit are siblings of the infant.

Before you allow a child to visit there are a few things to keep in mind:

- Make sure their vaccinations are up-to-date. We need to know whether they have had chicken pox or have been vaccinated against chicken pox.
- If a child has recently been vaccinated, they will need to wait 21 days after the vaccination before visiting.
- If a child has been exposed to chickenpox, please let us know.
- Please do not let a child visit if there is any chance they could spread an infection to others.

How long will my baby be in the NICU?

This is difficult to answer, since every baby is different. Although each baby is different, there are a few things babies need to be doing before they can go home:

- breathing on their own
- eating well on their own
- maintaining their body temperature
- gaining weight

Your healthcare team will talk with you about your baby's condition and expected length of stay.

Parenting in the NICU

How can I care for my baby in the NICU?

Pump or Breastfeed

- Providing breast milk for your baby is important and helps their development. Your nurse can support you in hand expression and pumping if needed.
- If your baby is ready for breastfeeding, your baby's nurse can support you.

Kangaroo Care

- Holding your baby skin-to-skin is one of the best things you can do for your baby and it's great for you as well!
- Kangaroo Care helps babies breathe, calms them, protects them from infection and helps their brain develop.
- It can also help you with breast milk production and bonding with your baby.

Read to your baby

- Reading helps you feel close to your baby.
- If you would like to borrow a book, just ask.

Be at your baby's bedside

- It is extremely important you are there when the doctor is so you are involved in your baby's care.
- We encourage you to be there as much as possible.
- This creates opportunity to get information and ask questions.
- Use the communication board located at your baby's bedside to write down any questions.

Baby care and comfort

- Your baby's nurse can help you learn and be comfortable with changing diapers, helping with feeds, checking temperature and bathing your baby. This will also help you get to know your baby and your baby's needs.

Keep a record

- Many parents keep a written journal while their baby is in the NICU.
- You may want to keep a record of special moments and milestones.

Remember that your baby needs rest periods; it is important that your baby is not constantly stimulated because it can affect their development. Your nurse will help you to understand your baby's sleep and wake cycles.

Celebrate your baby's NICU Milestones

- There are lots of milestones to celebrate during your baby's journey through the NICU.
- A list of milestones you may want to celebrate include:

Breathing	Activities of Daily Living
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Able to breath on own• Came off oxygen• Got rid of breathing tube• Came off CPAP• Came off high flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opened eyes• Wore clothes from home• First smile• First bath• Started tummy time
Cuddles	Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was held by mom or dad for the first time• Did kangaroo care• Met my grandparent/sibling/relative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reached birth weight• Passed birth weight• Weigh over 1000g• Weigh over 2000g• Weigh over 3000g• Weigh over 4000g
Transitions	Beds
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Today is baby's due date• Went home	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moved from isolette to a cot
Feedings	Tests and Procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Started sucking on a soother• Had milk for the first time• Went to breast• Reached full feeds• Tube feed free	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passed my CCHD screen• Off Phototherapy

What can I bring in for my baby?

You are welcome to bring things from home for your baby. These things make your baby 'feel at home' and part of your family.

Clothes and blankets

- babies do not need clothes if they are placed in an isolette. It is not until your baby is in a cot that they will need to wear anything.
- if you like, you can also bring in blankets for your baby's bed.
- you are responsible for taking these items home to clean. Ask your nurse for a bag to store dirty items before taking them home.

Write your baby's last name on any items you bring to the nursery, so that there is less chance that they will get lost.

What else should I know about being a NICU parent?

How you may feel

- When your baby has a health problem that requires care in the NICU, you will feel many emotions. Please know that you are not alone with your feelings. Many NICU parents feel sad, anxious, and stressed.
- When your baby's birth does not happen as hoped, you may feel sadness, anger, guilt, or a strong sense of loss. All these feelings are normal. It is also normal for you to feel a loss of control as staff members provide care for your baby.
- We know that all parents can experience mental health issues after the birth of a baby. Many are common to NICU parents, including postpartum depression, postpartum anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Reach out for support

- Social Workers are available for any questions or concerns you may have. They can provide you with support, coping strategies, and tips that you may find useful.
- Your own healthcare provider (such as your obstetrician or family doctor) can also help you find support.

Taking care of yourself

- Sometimes parents get so focused on their babies that they lose touch with how they are doing. Take time to care for yourself! Try to keep your mind and body healthy.

Some Tips to Take Care of Yourself are:

- Allow time and space for your thoughts and feelings. Give yourself permission to feel overwhelmed and cry.
- Use coping skills that have worked in the past. Explore what works for you during difficult times.
- Consider ways to express yourself and be creative. For example keep a journal, write a blog or draw.
- Set a routine. Putting some structure in your day can help give you a sense of control.
- Rest whenever possible. Rest and sleep can help with your emotions.
- Find balance that works for you with visitors. To get enough rest you may need to limit the number of visitors.
- Accept help from others. Tell friends and family how they can help you. You may need help with shopping, cooking, cleaning and caring for your other children
- You will benefit from eating well, getting fresh air, and enjoying regular physical activity or exercise
- Connect with peers and friends.

The NICU Environment and Equipment

Why does so much equipment surround my baby?

The equipment around your baby helps the health care team take care of your baby. Each piece has a special purpose in your baby's treatment.

Equipment may be used to:

- keep your baby warm
- give your baby oxygen
- give your baby food, fluid or medicine.
- monitor your baby's weight, heart rate, breathing rate, oxygen saturation, and blood pressure

It can be overwhelming to see your baby connected to so many wires and tubes. We promise that the equipment is there to provide your baby with the care they need to get better.

As you sit with your baby, you will notice that most of the equipment shows numbers on a screen. Sometimes these numbers flash and you will hear an alarm or ringing sound. While this may be scary, your baby's health care team are trained to know what these numbers and alarms mean and how to respond if needed.

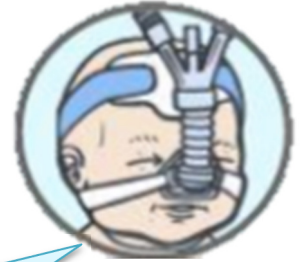
For information about equipment, numbers or sounds, please talk with a member of the team.

Common Types of Equipment



Incubator

A type of bed that is closed on all sides to keep your baby warm and safe



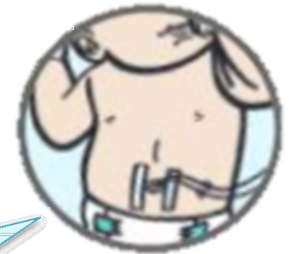
Continuous Positive Airway Pressure

A device that is put over your baby's nose to help them breathe, it is also called CPAP



Phototherapy

An eye mask is used while a special light helps break down bilirubin in your baby's blood.



Umbilical Catheter

A type of IV that is in your baby's umbilical cord to give your baby fluids, nutrients or medications



Nasogastric Tube

A small tube that is put in your baby's nose or mouth that goes down into their stomach. It helps feed your baby breastmilk or formula



Pulse Oximeter

A wire that is attached to your baby's foot or wrist to monitor the amount of oxygen in their blood



Peripheral Intravenous Catheter

A type of IV that is in your baby's hand, foot, leg, or scalp to give your baby fluids, nutrients or medications



Cardiopulmonary Monitor

Wires attached to your baby's chest are hooked up to a screen that monitors your baby's heart rate, breathing rate, and oxygen in their blood

Going Home

Discharge

In the coming days or weeks, as your baby gets well, he or she will be discharged home. We will help to prepare you and your baby for discharge. Caring for your baby as much as you can on your own in hospital will help prepare both of you for going home.

Your baby will be ready for discharge when he or she:

- is able to maintain his/her temperature in an open crib
- is maintaining a regular heart and respiratory rate
- is feeding from your breast or bottle and gaining weight
- has a doctor

The excitement of your baby coming home may be overshadowed by the fear/anxiety of looking after your baby. Feeling unsure about your ability to provide for your baby or to recognize and manage any health problems that may occur is normal. Our team will support you in transitioning your baby home and help you feel comfortable in the care you will be providing.

During your NICU stay you will:

- be involved in your baby's care from the start of your stay
- learn to give a bath and change diapers and clothing
- feed your baby and learn how s/he feeds and burps
- learn how to give oral medication
- learn ways to comfort or settle him/her
- understand his/her cues for hunger, of being over stimulated or tired
- understand signs and symptoms of illness
- learn to feel comfortable positioning and handling your baby
- learn about any specific care your baby may need at home

Follow-up Once Home

It is very important that your baby continues to receive the proper care once discharged from the NICU. Before discharge a plan will be made for follow-up appointments with either a paediatrician or your family doctor.

Parents are encouraged to contact their healthcare provider soon after your baby is born to ensure they will care for your baby after discharge.

Resources

Health education in the NICU

We encourage parents to learn as much as they can. Learning will help you:

- understand your baby's condition
- make decisions with the health care team, and
- take part in your baby's care.

Your main source for information while your baby is in the NICU is your baby's health care team. Ask questions, attend rounds, and gain as much information from them as you can.

The NICU also has many educational materials on topics such as breastfeeding, health conditions, and tests or procedures that your baby may need.

If there is anything further we can help you with let us know, we are here to help.

Direct line to the neonatal staff: 705-759-3632

- For more general infant care information refer to your **Mother Infant Care Manual**.
- For more information on breastfeeding request our **Best Start** handbook.
- For more information on formula feeding request our **Formula Feeding Handout**.