

UNICEF UK BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

GUIDANCE FOR PROVIDING CARE DURING THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) OUTBREAK

GUIDANCE SHEET 4: SUPPORTING PARENTS WITH A BABY ON THE NEONATAL UNIT WHO ARE SEPARATED DURING COVID-19



Delivering Baby Friendly services at this time can be difficult. However, babies, their mothers and families deserve the very best care we can provide. This document on supporting parents with a baby on the neonatal unit is part of a series of guidance sheets designed to help you provide care.

OVERVIEW

Concerns about the new coronavirus outbreak have resulted in a number of restrictions and separations of parents and babies on neonatal units. Whilst the safety of babies, their parents and staff working within [neonatal services](#) is paramount, it is important to acknowledge both the short- and long-term impact that this separation may have on already vulnerable babies and their families.

The [Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative neonatal standards](#) recognise this and promote the role of parents as partners in the care of their baby to help support improved outcomes for babies and their families. This includes being present with their baby to offer comfort and reassurance, engaging in skin-to-skin contact, providing breastmilk to support their [immune development](#) and being actively involved in caregiving and advocating for their baby. When planning for infection control during the Covid-19 crisis, it is important to consider the negative impact of separating parents and infants and how this can be minimised whilst maintaining safety for families and staff.

USEFUL INFORMATION

[Studies show](#) that separation of mothers and babies results in higher stress levels. Babies receiving invasive interventions have been shown to already have elevated stress levels, which over time can result in insecure early attachment, poorer neurological outcomes, lower immunity and a negative parental mental health impact.

HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS (Note: these suggestions are not exhaustive and are intended to help support good practice during this difficult time)

1. If there are limits placed on the amount of time parents can spend with their baby on the neonatal unit, it is crucial to make the most of any time they do have together. Within the parameters of safety, enable as much touch as possible through skin-to-skin contact, containment holding and breastfeeding. Supporting other communication such as talking, reading and singing to the baby is also [important](#).

2. When parents are on the neonatal unit, it is important to check in on how they are coping with the stress of the situation and acknowledge their anxieties. Referral for additional support may be necessary. [Having conversations with parents](#) about preparing for the time they can be with their baby again may help them to feel hopeful. This will also support them to look forward to some special times together.

3. The BadgerNet Baby Diary enables staff to share photos and comments with the mother and family. This free system is available to parents on the Baby Diary website and via an app on Apple/Android devices. A BadgerNet User Manager can contact the service via info@clevermed.com or the Service Desk to enable Baby Dairy for their unit. More information can be found on the Service Console tab of the BadgerNet Client.

4. Consider recording stories read by the baby's parents on a mobile phone to play for the baby. Be sure to tell parents about their baby's reaction and reassure them that the baby heard their voices.

5. Journal inserts (handprints, footprints, photos, etc.) could be collected and sent to the parents at home so they could add them to their baby journal.

6. Staff could maintain a [daily diary of baby's activities](#) during the day, which may include feedback about cuddles, enjoyment of feeds, cares and interactions and personal information of who was providing care.

7. Hearts, mini boos and/or muslin cloths can be kept in the incubator and sent home to the baby's mother so she can smell and connect with her baby when expressing her milk.

Storing them in a plastic bag will ensure the smell is retained.

8. Staff should proactively contact parents at agreed times of day (where possible) to keep them updated as to their baby's progress.

Checking in on how they are coping is important, with appropriate referrals made if necessary.

9. Every experience matters for the baby's [brain development and long-term outcomes](#). Staff caring for babies can ensure that everything they do (daily cares, tube feeds and clinical intervention, etc.) is done with love and care. All developmental care approaches should be particularly embraced so that babies feel safe, reassured and comforted.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- [Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative statement on infant feeding on neonatal units during the Covid-19 outbreak](#)
- [BAPM/BLISS Family Integrated Care for Covid-19 - FAQs](#)
- [BAPM Perinatal Covid-19 resources](#)
- [RCPCH Covid-19 guidance for paediatric services](#)
- [Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative neonatal care research page](#)
- [Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative resources on neonatal care](#)
- [Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative Burdett Project report and evaluation summary](#)