

## Signs of Breathing Problems

### *Caring for your infant at home*

Before you take your baby home from the hospital, we want you to know what it might look like if your baby starts to have breathing problems (*respiratory distress*). The first step is to know how your baby's normal breathing looks, so that you will notice if there is a problem. Ask your nurse if you have questions about your baby's normal breathing pattern.

### Warning Signs

Here are some signs that something may be wrong :

- **Your baby is taking too many breaths.** Ask your baby's nurse how many breaths your baby normally takes in a minute. This number may be different for your baby than for other babies. In general, if your baby is breathing over 70 times a minute, that is too fast.
- **Your baby is working harder than usual to breathe.** You may notice these symptoms:
  - *Retractions:* You can see the muscles in your baby's chest (under the ribs and maybe even below the neck) going in and out much more deeply than usual.
  - *Nasal flaring:* Your baby's nostrils flare out while breathing in. This means your baby is working harder to breathe.
  - *Grunting:* You hear a grunting noise at the end of your baby's breath. This could mean your baby is trying to open a blocked airway.
  - *Wheezing:* You hear a whistling sound when your baby breathes out. This may mean there is a blockage in the small airways in your baby's lungs.
  - *Hoarse, barking cough:* This may be a sign of an infection in your baby's windpipe and bronchial tubes (*croup*).



*Ask your NICU nurse if you have any questions about your baby's normal breathing pattern.*

- *Cyanosis*: The skin looks blue. A grayish-blue color appears around the lips, eyes, under nails.
- *Congestion*: Your baby's chest feels crackly, nose sounds stuffy.
- **Your baby isn't feeding well.** Feeding intolerance and breathing problems often happen together.
- **It is hard to wake your baby up to feed, or your baby's energy level seems to have rapidly declined.** These are symptoms of *lethargy*.
- **Your baby has a fever higher than 100.4°F (38°C).** Lung infections often cause a fever.

## What to Do

- **Call 911 right away if your baby is blue or not breathing.**
- If you are think your baby may be in respiratory distress, call your baby's primary care provider (PCP) **right away**. Trust yourself. You know your baby better than anyone.

Before calling your baby's PCP, have this information ready:

- How your baby's breathing is different than usual
- Your baby's temperature
- How your baby is eating

## Before Discharge

Before your baby leaves the hospital:

- Talk with your nurse about signs of breathing problems so you will be able to recognize them at home.
- Post your PCP's phone number where you and others can find it quickly.
- Know what number to call after hours and on weekends and holidays.
- Know when to:
  - Call your baby's doctor
  - Go to the emergency room
  - Call 911

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Talk with a member of your baby's healthcare team if you have questions or concerns.

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit:  
206.598.4606