Welcome to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC). This handout introduces you to our unit and gives you information about the services and support that are available to all of our families.

Having a sick or premature baby can be frightening. We recognize that this is a stressful time for you. Our staff and practitioners are here for you and your baby.

Partners in Your Baby’s Care

You and your baby are the center of our care team. Our guiding principal is that parents do not “visit” their baby, but rather provide care and parenting. We will work with you to manage your baby’s daily care, including times when you can hold, feed, and bathe your baby.

As parents of a NICU infant, you are welcome in the NICU at all times of the day or night. We want you to be as comfortable as possible while you are here. We also respect and want to nurture the bond between you and your baby.

We welcome you and support you during this time. Please let us know if we can do anything to make things easier for you during your baby’s stay in the NICU.

Daily Health Screening

Even minor cold symptoms can be a serious health risk to premature infants. To keep your baby and others safe, we screen everyone for health concerns before they enter the NICU. You and your guests will answer a short health survey every day that you visit the NICU.

We may ask you more questions about your health when we know that colds, flu, and other illnesses are active in the hospital and community.
Sick family members and friends must stay home until they have been free of symptoms for at least 24 hours. If you have questions, please talk with the Charge Nurse.

Hand Washing

Everyone who visits the NICU must wash their hands and arms up to the elbows before they enter the unit. Scrub sinks are at the front and rear entrances of the NICU. Since you will need to remove any jewelry from your wrists and hands, it is best to leave valuables at home.

Please:

- Remove any jewelry from your wrists and hands. Do not put the jewelry back on until you leave the NICU.
- If you have long sleeves, roll them up above your elbows.
- Wash your hands and arms to your elbows with soap and water for at least 30 seconds.
- Then, when you enter your baby’s room, wash or gel your hands again before you touch your baby.
- After touching your baby, wash or gel again.
- If you do not see staff, providers, or others wash or gel our hands before touching your baby, please feel free to remind us.

Your Baby’s Room

- You may place items in your baby’s room that are appropriate for your baby’s age. Only items that have a smooth surface and can be sanitized may be placed in the incubator or crib.
- We use state-of-the-art monitoring, communication, and security systems. These allow us to keep an eye on your baby at all times. Your baby’s nurse will help you to understand these systems and how to call a staff member if you need help.
- The refrigerator in your baby’s room is for your baby’s food. You may keep sealed drinks in your baby’s refrigerator. Please do not place any food or open drinks in your baby’s refrigerator.

Siblings in the NICU

- Your baby’s brothers and sisters may visit at the bedside when a parent is in the room. You will need to fill out a special health-screening questionnaire for siblings under the age of 13. Screening includes a temperature check.
• Remember that toddlers and preschoolers have short attention spans, so please keep their visits short.

• An adult must supervise children at all times while they are in the hospital.

• Twin (or triplet, etc.) siblings, who are visiting an admitted sibling, need to arrive and leave the NICU in a car seat or stroller.

• Please ask a staff member if you have any questions about bringing your children to visit their sibling.

Visits from Family and Friends

• Your family and friends, age 13 and older, are welcome to visit your baby when you are in the room.

• Because of limited space, we ask that no more than 3 to 4 visitors (including you) be in your baby’s room at a time.

• During nursing change of shift, your guests will need to wait in the visitor area outside the NICU.

• Please tell your family and friends that we cannot provide patient information to anyone other than you. You will decide what information you wish to share with your family and friends about your baby’s condition and keep them up to date.

• If you have information you do not want us to talk about when family or friends are present, please tell your baby’s nurse or doctor so that we can take extra privacy measures.

• In special circumstances, you may choose a close family member or friend to spend time with your baby when you cannot be in the NICU. Please tell your baby’s nurse if this needs to happen so we may get your written consent.

Basic Guidelines for Visiting the NICU

To provide a safe, restful, and healthy setting for you and your baby, please:

• Keep noise levels low:
  – Use quiet voices when talking in your baby’s room.
  – Mute all personal electronics or listen with headphones.

• Do not wear perfume, aftershave, or other scented products when you plan to visit.
Cell Phones

- You may use your cell phones in the NICU, but please leave the ringer in silent or vibration mode. A ringing cell phone could disturb your baby or the other babies nearby.

- When talking on the phone, please speak quietly to help keep noise low. If you will be talking on your cell phone for a long time, please consider having your conversation outside your baby’s room.

- Please consider limiting your cell phone use while you are in the NICU. If you must make or receive a call, it is best to go to a private area away from your baby and other patients.

- You may text, read emails, use personal tablets or laptops, and search the internet in your baby’s room. It may help you to stay close to your baby while also taking your mind away from the stress of the NICU for short periods of time. Just remember to wash your hands or use gel after touching these devices!

- Do not use cell phones and personal electronics while you are holding your baby.

Cell Phone Safety

Please review these important safety guidelines before using your cell phone in the NICU:

- Once you have sanitized your hands, do not pick up your phone again until you are done holding your baby. Cell phones can have many germs on them.

- Cell phones may interfere with some medical equipment. If you need to answer or make a call on your cell phone while you are in your infant’s room, please make sure you are at least 3 feet (an arm’s length) away from all medical equipment. Use the bedside phone in your baby’s room for your calls when you can.

- Please do not hold your baby and use your cell phone at the same time! Holding your baby is a special time. It is important that you focus on your baby.

- If you want to take a picture with your cell phone, please ask for help.

- Please use Wi-Fi or airplane mode whenever you can. You can easily log into free UWMC Wi-Fi.

- If you touch your cell phone while you are in the NICU, please re-wash or gel your hands.
NICU Family Lounge

- Room SA4462 is our Family Lounge. It is on your left as you enter the NICU. Please enjoy the lounge to eat, rest, and visit with other NICU families when you are not at your baby’s bedside.

- The lounge has a refrigerator with freezer, sink, microwave, dishwasher, hot tap, water dispenser, and TV.

- There is also a bathroom with a shower. There are towels you may use, but you will need to bring your own shampoo, soap, and other personal items.

- A washer and dryer are available for your personal laundry. You may need to bring your own laundry detergent and fabric softener.

- Feel free to use the refrigerator to store food items. Many families use the refrigerator, so please label all containers with the date and your name, and leave space for others to store their food, too.

- You may eat and drink at your baby’s bedside, in the Family Lounge or in the waiting room.

- Environmental Services staff will clean the Family Lounge daily, but staff will not do dishes. Please help us keep the area neat and tidy, and wash your dishes as soon as you can after using them.

Family Lounge and Waiting Room Guidelines

- Our large family and waiting rooms have comfortable chairs and sofas where families can relax and take a break. **For safety reasons, do not leave children unattended in the Family Lounge or in the waiting room.**

- There is a TV in both the Family Lounge and the waiting room. Feel free to watch your favorite show. Please be considerate and remember that the TV is for everyone’s use:
  - Keep the volume at a moderate level.
  - Make sure that what you are watching is appropriate for all viewers.

Internet Access

The Family Lounge has computers with internet access. We also have wireless access in most areas of the NICU if you want to use your laptop computer or tablet.

If you need to print something from your email or the internet, please visit the Health Information Resource Center. The resource center has computers, a printer, and other business services. It is in the 3rd floor lobby, next to the Gift Shop, and is open weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Medical Rounds

- Every morning, the NICU attending doctor, resident doctors, nurse practitioners, your baby’s nurse, and other staff involved in your baby’s care meet. They review what has happened with your baby in the past 24 hours and decide on the plan of care for the next day. These meetings are called “rounds.”

- As an important member of your baby’s care team, you are welcome to join rounds. Talk with your baby’s nurse to find out when the team will be “rounding” to talk about your baby’s plan. If you are not able to be here during rounds, ask to talk with a care provider for an update on your baby’s current status and plan.

- Usual times for rounds are:
  - Nurse practitioner rounds: 8 to 9 a.m.
  - Neonatal attending doctor rounds: 9 to 11 a.m.

Nursing Report (Change of Shift)

- During “nursing report,” nursing staff review your baby’s history and plan of care at the bedside. This occurs when nurses are changing shifts. Usual times for nursing report are from 7 to 7:30 a.m. and from 7 to 7:30 p.m. Nursing report may also occur at 3 p.m. and 11 p.m.

- Parents are welcome during nursing report. If you arrive after report has started, please enter quietly and save your questions until the nurses are done with their report.

- The report on each baby usually lasts 5 to 15 minutes. If you have more input or questions than time allows, a nurse will return to talk with you about your concerns after they finish their reports on the other NICU babies.

Parenting in the NICU

Parenting is essential to the well-being of all newborns. Your baby needs you – especially while in the NICU.

We know you want and need to be close to your baby during this time. You are welcome to be with your baby 24 hours a day!

Parenting can mean many things in the NICU. It will evolve as your child progresses. You may start by sitting quietly by your baby’s bedside. Later, your baby may hold your finger in a tiny fist. You may comfort your baby by “containing” your child with your hands.
During this stressful time, we encourage you to take care of yourself – as well as your baby. Be at the bedside as often as you need, but be aware that you may not be able to rest well in the NICU. Your baby’s care continues day and night, sometimes every hour or more often. We have a space for you to rest or sleep in your baby’s room, but it may be more restful to return to your own home to rest and recover.

Your baby’s health and safety are our top priority – but your health and safety are also a priority! We support you, both in parenting and in self-care, so that you can stay healthy and rested for your infant.

Guidelines for Sleeping in Your Baby’s Room

- Because of our limited space, we ask that only 1 parent stay overnight. Please ask to talk with a charge nurse if you have special circumstances.
- Talk with your baby’s nurse about a plan for the night:
  - Options for skin-to-skin (kangaroo care) time
  - When mom would like to pump and/or feed baby
  - How you can participate in your baby’s care
  - Plans for parent sleep time

For your comfort, we offer:

- **Sheets, pillows, and other linens.** We ask that you please keep your child’s room tidy, folding and storing bed linens when not in use.
- **A small storage cabinet for personal belongings in each room.** Please leave valuables at home. UWMC is not responsible for lost or stolen items.
- **A small refrigerator to store breast milk and formula.** You may keep a daily supply of closed beverages in the door of the refrigerator.
- **Family Lounge with refrigerator (with water/ice dispenser), microwave, toaster, and more.** The large refrigerator is for storing extra food – please remember to label items with your name and date.

**Kangaroo Care: Skin-to-skin Contact**

Kangaroo care is the practice of babies having skin-to-skin contact with their parents for long periods of time. During kangaroo care, the baby is naked except for a diaper, held upright on the parent’s chest, and covered with a blanket.

Usually, mothers and fathers “wear” their babies for 2 to 3 hours at a time. Talk with your nurse about best timing for you to do kangaroo care.

Research shows that babies benefit in many ways during skin-to-skin care:

- Breathing, heart rate, and oxygen saturation levels are more stable during kangaroo care.
• Babies stay warm because the parent’s body helps regulate the baby’s body temperature.
• Babies sleep better, which leads to improved growth.
• Mothers who give kangaroo care and are breastfeeding produce more milk.
• Parents report less anxiety and feel more comfortable caring for their infants.

Kangaroo care can also:
• Help with bonding and attachment
• Improve digestion
• Help fight infections
• Promote brain growth

What Parents Say About Kangaroo Care
“I love my kangaroo care time with Henry. As a dad, it can be hard finding a way to contribute directly to his progress. Kangaroo care is the best way I have found to help him grow while building a bond with him.”

Nate (father of NICU baby)

“Holding your baby for the first time is an overwhelming experience, no matter what the circumstances surrounding the moment. Joy, comfort, hope; each moment generates a different emotion. Kangaroo care builds an immeasurable bond, a lasting connection between parent and baby that elicits memories that cannot be put into words.”

Gretchen (mother of NICU baby)

What to Bring from Home
You may find it useful to have these items during your time in the NICU:
• Laptop computer or notebook (the hospital has wireless internet access)
• MP3 player, iPod, DVD player, or other small electronics
• Books, magazines, and small handcrafts such as knitting or crochet
• Your own toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, body wash, and other toiletries
• Your own pillow, comforter or quilt, or other items to make you comfortable
Library, Classes, and Support Groups

- The NICU has a small library with educational children’s books. Feel free to borrow them, but please return them when you are done with them so other families can use them.

- Next door to the Family Lounge is the NICU classroom. We hold a variety of daily classes to educate you on your baby’s care. Please see the schedule of classes posted on bulletin boards in the Family Lounge and outside the classroom.

- There are also many support groups available for parents and families of babies in the NICU. Please see the bulletin board just outside the Family Lounge.

The NICU classroom offers classes to help you learn about your baby’s NICU care.

Respecting Others’ Privacy

Please respect the privacy of care providers and other families in the NICU:

- Ask permission if you would like to take a picture or a video that may contain a nurse, doctor, or other staff member.

- Never take a photo or video of another family, baby, or another baby’s name card.

Hospital Parking

- You may park in the underground Triangle Garage across from the medical center. We provide 1 free validation for parents each day.
Questions?

If there is something you do not understand, please ask questions. Every question you ask is important!

• When you don’t understand a term, ask any care provider to clarify its meaning.

• Ask for more information when you don’t understand a treatment or why it needs to be done. Ask about possible side effects.

• Keep asking questions until you are satisfied that you understand what you need to know.

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit: 206.598.4606

• If you will be leaving the hospital and returning, please ask the parking attendant about an in and out pass.

• Other visitors may get parking validation for a reduced parking fee. Talk with the staff at the NICU reception desk about parking validation.

Important Contact Information

NICU front desk ................................................................. 206.598.4606
NICU nurse manager............................................................ 206.598.4611
Social worker ........................................................................... 206.598.4629
Lactation nurse ...................................................................... 206.598.4628
Spiritual Care ...................................................................... 206.598.9174
UWMC Patient Relations .................................................. 206.598.8382
NICU Volunteer/Mentor Program ........... 206.598.8025, uwnicu@uw.edu
Health Information Resource Center .... 206.598.7960, healthed@uw.edu