

Protecting Your Baby from Infections

Caring for your premature baby at home

Premature babies are at a higher risk of getting an infection and needing to return to the hospital after discharge. As a parent, there are many things you can do to lessen your baby's infection risk.

Basic Care

The basics of good baby care are your baby's first defense against infection. Make sure your baby:

- Gets plenty of rest
- Eats well
- Has regular checkups
- Receives all recommended immunization (vaccines)

Hand Washing

The most important thing to remember is to wash your hands. Just like when you were in the NICU, wash your hands:

- Before touching your baby
- After touching your baby
- Between diaper changes

Remember to have soap or hand gel by all your sinks. It is a good idea to have hand gel in your baby's room, in your purse, and in your baby's diaper bag.



Hand washing is the most important thing you can do to protect your baby against infection.

Breast Milk Can Offer Infection Protection

Breast milk is considered the best food for your baby for the first 6 months of life. Mother's milk can help your baby's immune system fight lung and stomach infections.

Screen and Limit Visitors

- **Do not let anyone who is sick be near your baby.** Just like when your baby was in the NICU, if someone has any signs of a cough or flu, they should wait to visit until they are completely well.
- **Limit how long your guests stay.** This will lessen the amount of time your baby may be exposed to an infection.
- **Do not let your baby be near anyone who smokes.** Secondhand smoke can harm your baby's lungs and increase their chances of getting an infection.

Avoid Public Places

For several weeks after you bring your baby home, do not take your baby to crowded areas, such as a mall or a church. This is extra important during colder months of the year, when viruses that affect breathing are more common.

Preventing Respiratory Syncytial Virus

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a virus that spreads easily when someone with RSV coughs or sneezes. The virus can live on countertops, doorknobs, hands, and clothing for up to 7 hours.

During RSV season (October through March in Washington state):

- Wash your hands often.
- Avoid crowded places and areas where school-age children gather.
- Talk with your baby's primary care provider about your day care plans. Your baby may qualify for Synagis, a medicine that can help lower your baby's risk of getting RSV. Ask your NICU care team if your baby qualifies for Synagis.

Questions?

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

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