



Chapter 2. Life in the neonatal unit

Parent educational material for app

Imperial Neonatal Service, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust

Life in the neonatal unit

Welcome to our neonatal unit!

Having a baby admitted to a neonatal unit is often an unexpected and unsettling experience for parents. When your Baby is admitted to us, we aim to help you feel welcome and to provide you with reassurance and information.

Aims for this chapter

We want you as a parent to:

- read more about the Imperial Neonatal Service and our two neonatal units
- understand the importance of hand hygiene and how to maintain it
- have practical details about contacting the unit and car parking
- know about how ward rounds happen in the units
- understand how we maintain privacy and confidentiality
- see how we work as part of a local neonatal network to get you and your Baby closer to home

1.1 Imperial neonatal units

We provide care for extremely preterm babies (less than 27 weeks' gestation) and more mature babies at Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea Hospital and St Mary's Hospital. We also treat babies with complex medical needs, including cardiac and neurological problems, as well as babies with hypoxic ischaemic encephalopathy and retinopathy of prematurity.

We treat the extremely preterm babies in the neonatal intensive care unit at Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea Hospital. More mature babies born above 27 weeks' gestation are cared for at St Mary's Hospital. Both neonatal units provide cooling therapy for term babies with hypoxic ischaemic encephalopathy.

Each year more than 900 babies are admitted to our two neonatal units, making us one of the largest neonatal services in the UK.

You will be given a copy of our information pack, which includes our hand hygiene and visiting guidelines, and the 'Bliss Parent Information Guide' about having a premature or sick baby along with other useful information.

Additionally you will receive more information about our **Integrated Family Delivered Care programme (IFDC)**.

How to contact the neonatal unit

If you are unable to be here in person or you need an update about your Baby when you are not with us, you can call the unit at any time and ask to speak to your Baby's nurse. If they are unable to come to the phone immediately, you will be asked to call back in a few minutes. To maintain patient confidentiality, information cannot be given to other family members or friends.

If there is a sudden change in your Baby's condition, our team will contact you immediately. Please make sure that we have your correct contact numbers.

Phone numbers for our neonatal units:

	Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea Hospital neonatal unit
Reception	020 8383 3158
Intensive care (ITU)	020 8383 3174 / 3474
Low dependency (LDU)	020 8383 3908 / 5137

	St Mary's Hospital neonatal unit
Reception	020 3312 1103
Intensive care (ITU)	020 3312 6294/ 6453
High dependency (HDU)	020 3312 5083
Special care 1 (SCBU)	020 3312 5059
Special care 2 (SCBU)	020 3312 5876

For questions about neonatal follow-up clinic appointments once your baby has been discharged contact our neonatal secretaries on 020 3313 5369 or by fax 020 3313 1122.

Being with your Baby:

Parents can be with their Baby at any time. Please see separate information regarding other people visiting in the information pack given to you on admission.

Parent accommodation:

There are parent bedrooms available on both Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea Hospital neonatal unit and St Mary's Hospital neonatal unit, which enable parents to stay overnight at the hospital for short periods. Facilities are limited and rooms are allocated according to individual parents' needs and agreed priorities as below:

- Mothers establishing feeding
- Parents preparing to take their baby home
- Parents with a critically sick baby

Public transport and car parks

Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea Hospital neonatal unit

Travel by London Underground:

From East Acton underground station it is about a 10 minute walk down Du Cane Road to Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea Hospital, which is on the left hand side of the road.

<https://www.imperial.nhs.uk/our-locations/queen-charlottes-and-chelsea-hospital>

General parking is very limited at or near all our hospitals, and charges apply.

Parking on the hospital site is available at £2.20 per hour. Please bring plenty of change to pay at the car park machines. For offsite parking please refer to the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham's website.

A reduced parking charge is available to families with babies on the neonatal unit. You can get a letter from reception which you can then take to the main reception (ground floor opposite the coffee shop). You will be given a permit to display in your car window to enable you to park your car in the staff car park at the back of the hospital for £5 per day.

St Marys Hospital neonatal unit

Travel by London Underground:

Take the Bakerloo, Hammersmith & City, District, or Circle lines to Paddington Station. St Mary's Hospital is just a few minutes walk.

<https://www.imperial.nhs.uk/our-locations/st-marys-hospital>

General parking is very limited near the hospital, and charges apply. There is no parking available for patients or visitors on the hospital grounds. Please refer to the Westminster City Council website for information on parking close to the hospital.

1.2 Preventing infection and hand hygiene

We are committed to preventing and reducing the occurrence of life-threatening infection in newborn babies by following a strict hand hygiene policy. Please help us to protect your Baby by following the rules below.

Why hand hygiene is so important:

Hand hygiene is the most important step in preventing infections.

Babies on the neonatal unit are very young and their immune systems are very immature. This makes them extremely vulnerable to infection. By following thorough hand hygiene to remove bacteria, you can reduce the risk of passing on infection, which may be harmful to your Baby.



When entering the neonatal unit

- Make sure you are bare below the elbows – roll up your sleeves to above the elbow.
- Remove all jewellery from your hands and wrists (only wedding bands are allowed).
- Make sure you do not have long nails or artificial nail extensions.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water according to the six steps, rinse off all the soap and dry your hands well, and then use alcohol gel and allow it to dry.



When entering the nursery

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water, dry them, (as shown in the picture below) and then use alcohol gel and



allow it to dry.

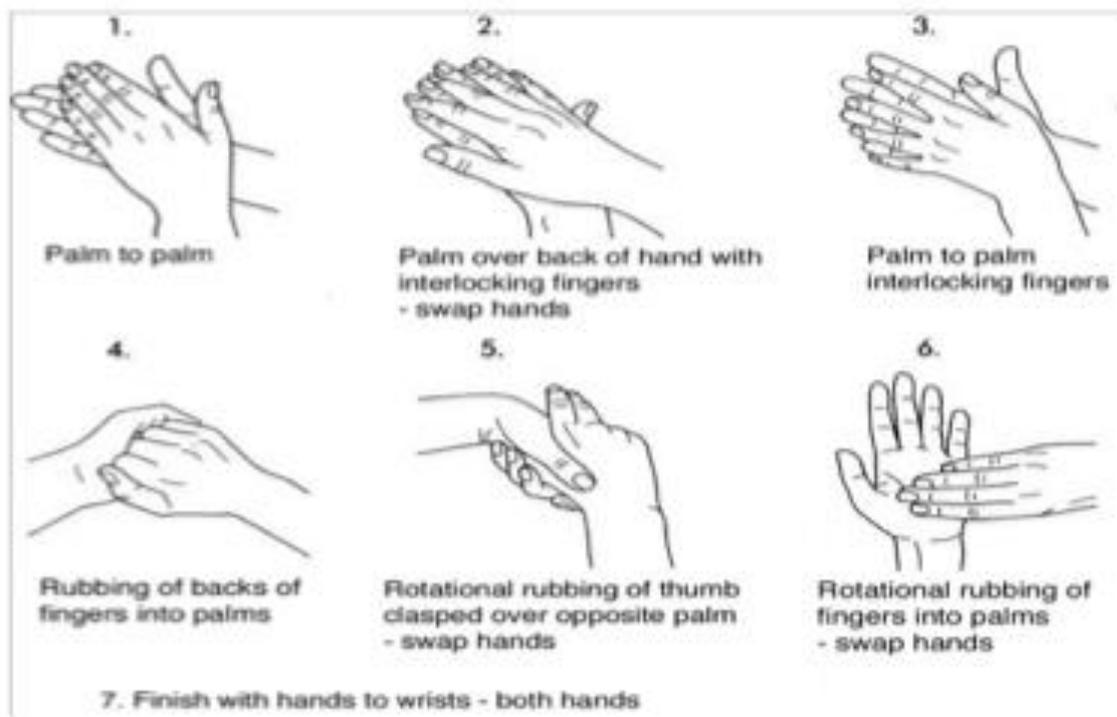
When staying with your Baby – remember **Gel-Baby-Gel** for hand hygiene

- We encourage you to touch and care for your Baby after following the above hand hygiene steps.
- If you remove your hands from inside the incubator and touch the area surrounding your Baby, use alcohol gel on your hands again and allow it to dry before touching your Baby.

When leaving your Baby and the nursery

- Clean your hands with alcohol gel and allow it to dry.

How to perform hand hygiene effectively



Being an advocate for your Baby

Parents have an important role in the neonatal unit. When families speak up, they help to make the neonatal unit a safe environment for vulnerable babies. If you see anyone not washing their hands before touching your Baby, please remind them of the importance of hand hygiene.

If you feel unwell

Please do not come to the neonatal unit if you experience any of the following:

- fever
- diarrhea or vomiting
- rash
- cough or sore throat.

Let the team know about your symptoms and we can discuss your plan, and how can we support you in caring for and feeding your Baby.



1.2 Parent education and support sessions

All parents of babies admitted to our neonatal units are invited to attend our programmes. Specific training sessions and one-to-one support are available for those parents who are interested in participating in our Integrated Family Delivered Care programme (IFDC).

Ask your Baby's nurse or the Integrated Family Delivered Care project nurse for the timetable of the available sessions or see IFDC notice boards.

We have a weekly parent group supported by our nursing staff and psychology team, where you can meet other parents, talk about you and your Baby's time on the unit and raise any questions or concerns. For relaxation, we also have parent crafting sessions and therapeutic music sessions weekly.

If you have any questions or concerns at any other time do let the nurse looking after your Baby or nurse in charge know or speak to the ward clerk or senior nurse. Their details are on a poster at reception.

1.3 Description of ward rounds

In the morning each day (usually between 09.15 and 11.00), the team comes together at your Baby's cotside to discuss your Baby's needs and progress and plan their care.

You are considered a key member of the team. The nurse or doctor will summarise your Baby's history and current presentation and raise any concerns that need consideration. The round is led by the consultant neonatologist or specialist registrar who coordinates the discussion and agrees the medical plan.

This is also your opportunity to tell your Baby's story; share observations from your time looking, touching and caring for your baby; and ask questions to help you understand your Baby's medical journey and your journey towards taking them home. Once you are more confident, you can participate in the ward round and present your Baby's progress. You can find helpful guidance on this in [Chapter 5 'Working together as a team'](#).

On some days, members of the wider multidisciplinary team will also attend the ward round to assess your Baby's development from different perspectives and to give you the chance to talk with them. A range of options and ways forward may be discussed before a specific plan is made and recorded in your Baby's medical notes.

The round usually begins with introductions – of the team and yourself – to help us all to build the good working relationships needed. If you need a longer conversation, or wish to discuss an aspect of your Baby's treatment in a more private setting, please ask and the consultant will arrange a time to meet with you.

1.4 Privacy and confidentiality – headphones

You are welcome to be at your Baby's bedside at all times. On the neonatal units at St Mary's and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea Hospitals we aim to provide around-the-clock access for all parents and to fully inform and involve you in your Baby's care. However, we must also consider and respect individual families' privacy and the confidentiality of their baby's medical information.

We know that it is very important for you as parents to plan your day with your Baby. Together with our nurses you can plan doing cares, having skin-to-skin contact (sometimes just called 'skin-to-skin'), feeding and attending daily routines such as ward rounds and handovers.

In order to help you be in the nursery with your Baby when it's convenient for you,



headphones are available during ward rounds and handovers. This will allow you to stay in the nursery with your Baby whilst other families are discussed without staff breaching confidentiality.

Confidentiality, privacy and bringing babies and families together are core values on our neonatal units. To respect these values we will invite you to stay and ask you to put on the headphones when other families are being discussed during ward rounds and handovers.

The headphones are special headphones which cancel out surrounding noises. For this reason you are not able to use your own headphones. When the doctors come to your Baby, they will ask you to remove the headphones so that you can participate fully in the discussion and plans.

Each cot should have its own set of headphones which are equipped with radio so you can enjoy uninterrupted time with your Baby and put your Baby's need for loving parental care first. Headphones are regularly cleaned with disinfectant wipes to maintain good hygiene.

When to use them:

- You will be required to wear the headphones if other families' care is being discussed whilst you are in the nursery. Most often this will be during ward rounds (in the morning) and handovers (in the evening).
- Staff may also ask you to use the headphones at other times.
- If you would like to, you may use the headphones at other times in the nursery.

How to use them:

- The nurse looking after your Baby will check if you plan to stay or leave the nursery before the team starts the ward round or handover.
- If you plan to stay in the nursery you will be passed a set of headphones. There are two sets of headphones at each cotside for your convenience.
- Sets will be cleaned by parents or nurses before and after use.



We still may ask you to leave the nursery in special circumstances:

Headphones can help to maintain confidentiality, but there may be certain situations when you will be asked to leave the nursery. This may happen during admissions, emergencies and procedures when the neonatal team needs more space to deliver safe, efficient care.

We are grateful for your understanding and cooperation in these situations.

1.5 North West London Perinatal Network

There are six hospitals in the North West London Perinatal Network as indicated on the map. Once specialist care is no longer required, your Baby's care may be continued at one of the other hospitals in the network that look after babies. This will be discussed with you if it is appropriate for you and your Baby. It is usually a hospital that is nearer to where you live that can offer the care your Baby needs to get ready to go home.



If you live outside of the network, we will let you know which network covers your local area and will liaise with the appropriate hospital for continuing care when your Baby is ready to be nearer to home.

Key messages and reflection:

After this chapter you should be able to:

- be aware of basic information around our services and units
- maintain good hand hygiene;
- know how we safeguard privacy and confidentiality
- understand how the North West London Perinatal Network works.

Further learning in this topic

If you wish to know more:

- make sure you attend our Parent Orientation session after the admission of your Baby
- read **Chapter 5 'Working together as a team'** and **Chapter 13 'Copying in the NICU'**
- think about how to plan your daily routine in the neonatal unit
- make sure you understand how to maintain good hand hygiene
- ask our neonatal team for help or any questions at any time
- ask for one-to-one support from one of our Integrated Family Delivered Care Project nurses
- use this app or your Parent Binder to record notes and questions.

Authors

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Resources

Neonatal service <https://www.imperial.nhs.uk/our-services/childrens-services/neonatology>

Hand hygiene, Parent information leaflet, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust

Using headphones in the neonatal unit, Parent Information leaflet, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust

Me and My Baby, FICare programme material, Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto, Canada

Bliss: www.bliss.org.uk

Best Beginnings: www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/smallwonders