

HAVING A BABY DURING COVID-19

Congratulations on welcoming a new baby!

Having a baby can be an exciting, intense or stressful time in people's lives.

Hospitals and birth centres in Ontario have put extra policies in place to help keep you and your baby safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is best to go to your planned birth-place where care providers and your health records are available.

Policies may be different at your place of birth and may change as the pandemic evolves. Your health and your baby's health are a priority. Hospitals and birthing centres are safe places. Your health care team is here to help.

Here is some information to help you know what to expect in case your baby needs special care. Neonatal or Special Care Nurseries are also called NICUs or SCUs. To keep this fact sheet short, we have used the term NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit).

For all parents:

It is normal to feel stress, anxiety and worry during this challenging time while your baby is in the NICU. Take time for yourself, try to eat healthy, connect with others through FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, etc., and get as much rest as possible.

If you feel lonely, depressed, or anxious, talk to your health care provider about it without delay.

Check with the staff at the NICU regarding their policies for being with your baby.

COVID-19 is not passed through breast milk. You can give your breast milk to your baby in the NICU by breastfeeding, hand expressing or pumping.

Try to breastfeed your baby, hand express or pump at least 8 times in 24 hours. This provides the nutrition your baby needs. It also increases your milk supply and helps breastfeeding once you and your baby are able to be together. For more information see "Breastfeeding your Early Preterm Baby" and "Breastfeeding your Late Preterm Baby" at <https://resources.beststart.org/product-category/resources/breastfeeding/>.

If you are pumping your breast milk at home or in the hospital, you need to follow instructions by your hospital staff. You also need to clean and sterilize your pump and equipment after each use it.

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For parents who are well (who don't have COVID-19):

In many NICUs, you can be with your baby. In some hospitals, you may be able to sleep in the same room with your baby.

Often, only one parent at a time can be with the baby, so you may have to decide which parent stays. This keeps a safe distance between all people in the NICU.

All parents are asked questions about COVID-19 before entering the hospital, and it's important to be truthful to keep babies, parents and health care providers safe.

There may be limits to going in and out of the NICU, and no visitors are allowed.

Wash your hands when you arrive at the NICU. Follow the directions by the NICU staff to keep babies, families, and staff safe.

You may be able to hold your baby skin-to-skin.

You may be able to breastfeed your baby if your baby is well enough.

For parents who have, or may have COVID-19:

You CANNOT be able to be with your baby in the NICU, to prevent infection to other babies, families, and health care providers.

If the other parent is well, they may be able to be with the baby.

The other parent may also be able to hold the baby skin-to-skin.

You can send your breast milk to your baby in the NICU. Follow the instructions by the NICU staff carefully about pumping, storing, and sending your breast milk. They can also show you how to sterilize the breast pumping equipment.

Some tips:

Stay informed about your baby's health in person (if possible) or virtually.

Try to connect online with NICU parent support groups.

If you can be with your baby in the NICU, start bonding with them by doing skin-to-skin, as well as talking, singing and reading, breastfeeding (if possible), or feeding by hand expressing or pumping. You can also help with your baby's basic needs, such as diaper changes.

Building up your milk supply right after your baby is born by breastfeeding, hand expressing or pumping.

Keep your phone clean and talk to your NICU staff about how to clean your phone. You'll be cleaning it a lot and the type of cleaner varies, depending on the kind of phone.