

Answers to common questions

Parents often have a lot of questions when their baby goes to the NICU. Below are some common questions and answers that may help you during your baby's first days in the NICU.

What happens right after my baby is born?

Most sick babies and babies born prematurely are taken to the NICU right after birth. A team from the NICU may have been in the delivery room with you. This team takes care of your baby on the way to the NICU.

What can I expect when I first enter the NICU?

During your first time in the NICU, you may:

- Meet the health care providers taking care of your baby
- Find out about your baby's health and the medical equipment and treatment she needs to get better
- Find out when you can spend time with your baby and participate in her care

Who is caring for my baby?

Your baby gets medical care in the NICU from many providers. These providers make up your baby's health care team. Providers on your baby's health care team may include a pediatrician, pediatric resident, nurse practitioner and registered nurse.

Your baby's providers may change throughout your baby's NICU stay. This depends on your baby's condition, the length of time your baby is in the NICU and the way the NICU schedules its staff. For example, in some NICUs, the same nurses may be assigned to care for your baby on most days, called primary nursing. In other NICUs, your baby may have different nurses

every day. The doctors may change over time, too. Even if the providers change, everyone on your baby's health care team works to give your baby the best care possible.

Talk with your baby's health care team about your baby's condition and any tests and treatments she may need. If you can't go to the NICU because of your own condition after giving birth, call the NICU and ask to speak to a provider on her health care team.

Will my baby have his own room?

Some NICUs have single rooms for babies. Others have all the babies in one large room. And some NICUs have both types of rooms.



This resource includes some medical terms you may hear in the NICU. You can find out what they mean in the *Words to know* section at the end of this resource.

Will my baby stay in the same room?

Your baby may have the same bed space or room during his NICU stay or he may be moved based on his health and the needs of the NICU.

How can I touch and hold my baby when he is in the NICU?

There are many different ways you can bond with and take care of your baby. Talk to the nurse about how you can touch, hold and feed your baby when she's in the NICU. Just by being there, you are helping your baby. She will come to know your smell, voice and touch.



What happens when I can go home, but my baby has to stay in the NICU?

As a parent, it can be hard to leave your baby in the hospital. You may live far away or have to go back to work right after your baby is born.

Or you may have older children at home to take care of. You may not be able to spend as much time as you'd like with your baby. If you don't live close to the NICU, ask the staff about free or low-cost hotels in the area for NICU parents. And some NICUs have rooms for parents to sleep in.

What can I tell people about my baby?

Many people may ask how your baby is doing. If you don't know how to respond, you can always tell them that your baby is in intensive care. Or you can say that you are taking one day at a time. It's also OK to thank people for their concern but tell them that you don't want to talk about it right now.

A lot of parents use social media and blogs to update family members and friends about their baby. Visit shareyourstory.org, the March of Dimes online community for families. You can blog about your baby on this website and get comfort, support and information from other NICU parents.

"Share Your Story has been my home from the second I found it. I can come here and speak my heart, and everyone understands and knows what to say to help. Community members have become family."

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Notes

What if my baby needs to go to another hospital?

Your baby may need to go to a different hospital to get certain kinds of care that aren't available in the hospital where he was born. If this happens, a team of health care providers, called the transport team, will travel with your baby to the new hospital. The team may take your baby in an ambulance, helicopter or airplane.

Here are some questions you can ask the health care team:

- Why does my baby need to go to another hospital?
- Where is my baby going? What is the telephone number and address of the new hospital?
- How will you move my baby? In an ambulance, helicopter or airplane? Can someone from my family go with my baby?
- Can I see or hold my baby before he leaves with the transport team?
- Who is on the transport team?
- How will I get updates about my baby during and after the move?

When your baby needs surgery right away

Finding out that your baby needs surgery right after birth can be upsetting. You may have to make quick decisions about the surgery and your baby's care. Talk to the doctors and nurses about your questions and concerns.



Photo by: Helen DeVos Children's Hospital

Notes

Words to know

health care provider — Also called provider. The person who gives medical care.

health care team — A group of health care providers who work together to care for a baby.

neonatologist — A pediatrician who has special medical training to take care of sick newborns and may direct your baby's care.

neonatology fellow — A pediatrician who is getting additional medical training to take care of sick newborns.

newborn screening test — Checks for serious but rare and mostly treatable conditions at birth. It includes blood, hearing and heart screening.

NG tube — See nasogastric tube.

NICU — Also called the neonatal or newborn intensive care unit. The place in the hospital where newborns go for special care.

neonatal nurse practitioner — Also called NNP. A nurse with special training to take care of sick babies. The NNP works with the baby's neonatologist, can do some medical procedures and may direct your baby's care.

premature birth — When a baby is born before 37 weeks of pregnancy.

primary nursing — The practice of having the same nurses take care of the baby on most days.

registered nurse — Also called RN. An RN in the NICU has special training in caring for sick newborns.

resident — A doctor who is getting training in a medical specialty. For example, a pediatric resident is getting training to become a pediatrician.

transport team — A team of health care providers who move babies from one hospital to another.