

The Importance of Hand Hygiene

Newborn babies do not have fully functional immune systems. This means that they can very easily catch germs. A baby who is premature or sick will find it difficult to fight these germs and the resulting illness will be more serious in a newborn than in an older child or adult.

The best way that you can keep your baby safe from infection is by washing your hands correctly and ensuring that your visitors also wash their hands.

Preparing to safely handle your baby

- Consider keeping your nails natural and short, and removing jewellery while your baby is in NICU
- NICU is very warm. To help reduce clutter around your baby, please place jackets, coats and hats in the lockers located by the sinks at the entrance to NICU
- Cell phones – we discourage the use of cell phones while you are caring for and visiting your baby

Washing with soap and water

- Your first hand wash should be at the sinks when entering NICU
- Roll your sleeves to your elbows, wet your hands and then apply one pump of soap. Briskly wash your hands paying special attention to your fingernails and between your fingers. Rinse your hands thoroughly, and then dry them well with paper towels. This should take 40-60 seconds.

Use of alcohol gel

- Alcohol gel or spray is available at all sinks in NICU, beside your baby's incubator/cot and at the clothing cupboard
- Use one full pump of gel or two sprays of hand sanitiser, and then rub hands together like you would when washing your hands, until the gel or spray has dried up. Do not rinse your hands after using the alcohol gel

- You should use the alcohol gel or spray immediately before touching your baby, after changing your baby's nappies and when leaving your baby's bedspace
- If you have more than one baby in NICU, you should use alcohol gel or spray between touching each baby
- Gel or spray is more effective than washing your hands with soap and water but you must use soap and water if your hands become visibly dirty.

Gloves

You will notice the staff in NICU always wear gloves when touching your baby. Parents do not need to wear gloves as you are not at risk of transmitting germs to other babies in NICU.

Visitors

- Although your visitors are not going to be touching your baby, it is still very important that they wash their hands when entering NICU as we want to keep our environment as clean as possible and free of germs.
- Children often carry a lot of germs which they pick up from daycare / school etc. To help reduce infection in NICU, we do not allow children under 12 years old to visit unless they are siblings. It is particularly important to ensure that your baby's brothers and sisters are well, that they wash their hands thoroughly on entering NICU and are supervised at all times.

By following these general hygiene guidelines, you can help reduce the risk of your baby getting an infection whilst in NICU or at home.