PROTECT YOUR BABY FROM GERMS & VIRUSES

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PROTECT YOUR BABY’S HEALTH

If you are a NICU parent you know how important it is to protect your baby from germs. By the time you and your baby go home, you will have spent hours at the NICU sinks soaping, scrubbing and rinsing. **Hand washing is probably the single most important thing you can do to protect your baby and your family.** But there’s more you need to know. If you’re going to give your baby the best chance for a healthy start, you’ll want to learn more about your baby’s immune system and how to protect it.

WHY BABIES NEED TO BE PROTECTED

All babies are vulnerable to germs, viruses and infections when they are born. Their immune system is new and immature and can’t produce the same germ-fighting antibodies they will when they are older. **Until your baby is at least two years old, you will need to be extra careful.** Your baby will be especially vulnerable if:

- **They Were Born Preterm** If your baby was born early, they didn’t receive all the antibodies they need from their mother. Also infants’ skin is very fragile and isn’t good at protecting them from germs.

- **They Have Special Medical Needs** Many NICU graduates have medical issues that put them at increased risk of infection. Babies with heart, lung and other conditions are at a greater risk of catching vaccine-preventable diseases. Some medicines also make a baby more vulnerable to germs, colds, and viruses.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT THEM

- **Feed Your Baby Breast Milk** Breast milk is a unique source of antibodies that help prevent and fight infections. Any amount you can feed your baby helps.

- **Wash Your Hands** Keeping your hands clean is one of the best things you can do to stop the spread of germs and viruses. Wash with soap and water or use alcohol gel. Ask everyone to do the same. Especially children.

- **Stay Away from People** While there’s a lot you can do to minimize the risk of infection, you can never be sure if everyone else is being as careful as you are. Avoid public places, crowded waiting rooms and other places where sick people might be.

CLEAN HANDS

**Remember** to wash your hands for at least 30 seconds. Soap, water and scrubbing kill and remove viruses, germs and dangerous microbes. If you use an alcohol-based product (gel), use enough of it to rub your hands for 15 seconds before it dries. Be aware that antibacterial soap is no better at killing germs than regular soap. In fact, using it may lead to the development of resistant bacteria, making it harder to kill these germs in the future.
Don’t Expose Your Baby to Smoking

The risks of smoking and second-hand smoke are very real and serious. If you smoke, quit. If someone who smokes wants to be around your fragile baby they should shower and change their clothes first. Exposing your baby to a smoker’s home or belongings will increase their risk of infections and breathing problems.

Get Your Immunizations

Getting vaccinated protects you and your baby. Vaccines are safe and reliable. If you have questions about how they work, their benefits and the risks of not getting vaccinated, talk to your baby’s medical team. Encourage your family and friends to make sure their vaccinations are up-to-date, too.

Get Your Baby Immunized

Babies who have been in the NICU will get some of their vaccinations before they go home. It is important that your baby get all their shots on schedule. You will want to get them as soon as you can based on their chronological age (birth date). Don’t use their adjusted age.

Advocate for Your Baby’s Protection

Some people believe that the only way for babies to build their immune systems is to be exposed to germs. This is a myth. It’s not true. The best way for your baby to stay healthy is to never get sick in the first place. Infections won’t make your baby stronger. They can, however, cause serious health problems.

3 RESOURCES YOU SHOULD KNOW

- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) - cdc.gov/vaccines/parents.
- Families Fighting Flu - familiesfightingflu.org.

3 PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP

- Your Pediatrician – Can work with you to make sure your child receives all their vaccinations on schedule.
- A Pulmonologist – Can help treat your baby for breathing problems, chronic lung disease, and other respiratory conditions.
- You Family and Friends – Can help you build a circle of immunity around your family by washing their hands, getting vaccinated, and letting everyone know how vulnerable babies can be.

5 WAYS TO PREVENT ILLNESS

- Wash Your Hands
  Hand washing saves lives!
- Get Vaccinated
  Getting all your vaccinations on schedule is the safest and best way to build immunity and avoid infection.
- Stay Away from Sick People
  Viruses spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes sending droplets into the air and onto surrounding surfaces – including you and your baby!
- Create a Germ-Free Home
  Use soap & water or disinfectants to clean. Change your clothes and take off your shoes when you get home. Wash your baby’s bedding often.
- Find Out If Your Child Qualifies for Synagis® antibody injections
  Babies who are at high-risk for complications from RSV infection can benefit from these monthly shots during RSV season.

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