

CUDDLING IN THE NICU

WELCOME TO THE NICU

The CHKD NICU is a very large unit. We can care for up to 70 infants, which is about half the beds in the hospital. Babies come to the NICU for a variety of reasons. Some are born prematurely, weighing less than a pound at birth. Others are full term, or close to term, and may have birth defects or complications at birth. Regardless of the reason for admission, many NICU babies spend months or even a year, in the NICU.

The NICU occupies most of the 4th floor. We have 3 “neighborhoods”; each neighborhood has 2 pods, and each pod has 10 patient rooms with 11-12 patient bedspaces. We have mostly private rooms, with 1-2 twin rooms in each pod.

Babies are not admitted to a certain bedspace or pod based on their diagnosis, so we don't have a “preemie pod” or a “cardiac pod”, etc. Babies are admitted to the space that has been designated an admission spot at the beginning of every shift, which means that babies of all sizes and reasons for admission are mixed together in every pod.

The NICU is very, very busy, so the help offered by Cuddlers is vitally important.



HOW CAN CUDDLERS HELP?

Even though it seems unfair, life goes on outside the NICU for parents whose babies have extended stays. Many have other children who need their attention. Some live a distance away and can't visit every day. Most have to return to work in order to save their leave for when baby finally comes home and to make ends meet. Most parents feel pulled in many directions and experience a great deal of guilt about not being able to be with their babies all the time.

Our Cuddlers are important members of the team, offering positive, comforting human contact when parents can't be present. It gives parents peace of mind to know their babies are being snuggled when they can't be there themselves.

When babies weigh enough to move from an isolette into a crib and are medically stable, they are eligible to be cuddled by our very special volunteers. Cuddlers can snuggle with babies in chairs, sing or read a book, or play with toys at the bedside.

Please note that the medical status of a baby can change quickly in the NICU, **and please respect the ultimate authority of the bedside nurse to make the decision on whether or not a baby can be held.**

OUR NICU PATIENTS ARE VERY FRAGILE

A cold, respiratory virus, or stomach bug can set our babies back or even kill them. One of the most important thing you can do for our babies is protect them from germs!

Please DO NOT come to cuddle if you have a cold, the flu or COVID-19, or show any symptoms of being ill, including cough, fever, vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat.

If you plan to continue to volunteer with Child Life on the same day you Cuddle, please come to the NICU first to avoid bringing any germs into the NICU.



HAND WASHING PROTOCOL

Remove all rings, bracelets and watches before entering the NICU, and roll sleeves up to your elbow.

Use the sink in the first Pod you enter to scrub. Use soap to wash hands and arms up to elbows thoroughly, paying special attention to between fingers and under fingernails. This scrub should take about 2 minutes.

Dry hands and arms.

Apply two squirts of Surgical Scrub in hand and repeat process, rubbing until completely dry.

Following this initial scrub, you may use Purell between babies. If you leave the 4th floor and return, you must completely re-scrub. If you hold a baby on contact precautions, you must completely re-scrub after holding.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE

Stop by the NICU Support Coordinators' desk between Pods 1 & 2. There you will:

- Pick up the pager and the pager phone number stickers
- Check the Cuddler binder for any communication information
- Check the Cuddler binder for a list of babies to focus on
- Then make your way around the NICU.

Your badge should allow access to the NICU. Please speak with Volunteer Services if your badge doesn't work.



START IN POD 1

Start to make your way around the unit, beginning in Pod 1

You can scrub in when you enter Pod 1

When you enter, let the nurses know you are here and are available to help; introduce yourself to staff; let them know you have the pager

Put the pager phone number stickers on the “daily sheet” in each pod

If there are no babies to hold or soothe, make your way around the unit, pod by pod



HOLDING A BABY

Only babies in cribs may be held. Babies on ventilators, even if in a crib, cannot be held by Cuddlers. Always check with the nurse before holding a baby.

You must wear a cloth gown when holding a baby. You may ask the nurse for a gown or get a clean one yourself. Gowns are stored in each room.

You do not need to use gloves/yellow gowns unless these items are at the baby's door and/or the baby is on contact precautions, as indicated by a green sign.

If you are able to hold a baby, please ask the nurse to assist you in picking him/her up until you are comfortable with the tubes and wires that may be attached to the baby.

Even after you become comfortable picking up the babies, please ask the nurse if there is anything you need to be aware of when picking up the baby (IVs, PICC lines, feeding tubes, etc.)



PUTTING THE BABY BACK

If you feel comfortable putting the baby back in the crib yourself, you may do so. Babies should be placed on their backs, unless the nurse asks you to place him/her in a different position.

Always be sure the crib rails are up when you put a baby back in his/her bed!

If you have any questions or would like help putting the baby back, please ask the baby's nurse, or any nurse in the pod.

PATIENTS ON CONTACT PRECAUTIONS

We often have babies on contact precautions. **You may cuddle babies on contact precautions**, and you must wear a yellow disposable gown and use gloves when holding.

Leave the yellow gown and gloves in the trash can at the baby's bedside after holding.

You must re-scrub after holding a baby on contact precautions. If possible, consider cuddling a baby on contact last on your shift.

ALWAYS communicate with the bedside nurse before holding a baby on contact precautions.

If a baby is on contact precautions, there will be a tray outside the room with gowns and gloves, along with a green "Contact Precautions" sign. Ask the nurse if you have questions.

PATIENTS ON DROPLET PRECAUTIONS

If a baby is on droplet precautions, we ask that you do not hold or interact with him/her.

Respiratory infections are spread easily, and NICU patients can get very sick and even die if they contract a respiratory infection.

WHAT IF THERE ARE NO BABIES TO HOLD?

Because this is an Intensive Care Unit, there are many reasons that a nurse may not allow a baby to be held, even if he/she appears to meet the holding criteria.

However, there are still ways you can interact with our babies even if you can't pick them up. If a baby is awake in a crib or bouncy seat, you can:

- Read a book. If there are no books at the bedside, ask one of the NICU Resource staff members to get one for you. Any books taken to a bedside must be left at the bedside.
- Play with a toy. Some of our older babies work on tracking objects with their eyes, bringing their arms up to grasp objects, etc.
- Talk or sing a song. Babies love to hear voices and look at faces.



COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

Parents may ask you questions! Please feel free to speak with them, especially if you have Cuddled their baby on a previous visit. NICU parents, like all parents, love to hear how cute their baby is.

Parents may ask you questions about the NICU. Here is some information to help you respond to their questions:

- Support Programs and Classes: we have many support programs and classes for NICU families. Calendars can be found at the Reception Desk.
- Journey Beads: Journey beads help families tell their baby's story in beads. Order forms can be found in the Family Lounge.
- Community Resources, Ronald McDonald House, etc: Refer parent to their Social Worker during the week and the charge nurse on nights/weekends.

CUDDLER GUIDELINES AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- Never ask the nature of a patient's illness
 - Never post information on Social Media about any patients
 - Never take photos of any staff or patients
 - Never repeat any information you hear about a patient or family
 - Do not chew gum, candy or other food while volunteering
 - Check in at the NICU Support Coordinator's desk, between Pods 1 and 2, when you arrive
 - Do not ask a doctor for professional advise
 - Do not perform unauthorized services for patients, such as feeding or changing diapers
 - Do not attempt to do anything you have not been trained to do
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NICU RESOURCE STAFF

Marnie Dyer, NICU Support Coordinator, marnie.dyer@chkd.org or 757-668-8016

Maureen Heald, NICU Support Coordinator, maureen.heald@chkd.org or 757-668-8012

Elizabeth Moll, Developmental Care Specialist, elizabeth.moll@chkd.org or 757-668-8494

Rachel Houck, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, rachel.houck@chkd.org or 757-668-7941



CELL PHONES AND PERSONAL ITEMS

- If possible, please leave all personal items in the Volunteer Office.
 - If your shift begins or ends at a time when the office is closed, you may leave your personal items in a locker in the back of one of the pods.
 - *Please do not take your cell phone into the Pods.*
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MEAL VOUCHERS

NICU Cuddlers are entitled to one meal voucher per shift, just like other hospital volunteers

Daytime Mon – Fri volunteers get voucher in volunteer office

Evening and weekend volunteers get voucher from Cuddler Notebook at the NICU Support Coordinator desk