Special Care For Special Babies

The neonatal intensive care unit at Providence St.Vincent Medical Center in Portland, Ore., provides state-of-the-art care for babies who are born early or who need medical or surgical treatment. Our unit is the largest Level III NICU in the Northwest and the third-largest on the West Coast.

Led by John McDonald, M.D., the doctors and nurses who work in the unit have advanced education and training in caring for these fragile babies. We know that having a baby stay in the NICU can be very stressful. The staff understands the fears, hopes and even the exhaustion of each family’s experience. We consider it a privilege to care for these babies and their families.

Welcome

Depending on the circumstances around the birth of your baby, a special team may be present at the delivery.

After your delivery, we make every effort to connect you with your baby as soon as possible. Your nurse will reunite you and your baby, and you will have a chance to meet your child’s care team and get updated information. If you do not deliver at St. Vincent’s, your baby may be transferred to the St. Vincent NICU or the closest NICU facility.

Parents are always welcome in the NICU; you are a vital part of your baby’s care.
What To Expect

Visiting your baby.
Family members and friends age 12 and over are welcome to visit your baby when appropriate. All visitors must check in, and children should always be with a parent. Up to three visitors can be at the baby’s bedside. Depending on your baby’s condition, you may be discharged before your baby. We understand this can be a difficult situation, and your care team will work with you to answer any questions you might have.

Keeping it clean.
NICU babies are very fragile, and we do everything we can to keep a healthy and clean environment. It is very important to wash your hands upon entering the unit, and before and after touching your baby. Make sure that no one, including you, has an illness or infection, such as a cold, flu or cold sore.

Knowing your care team.
Your baby will have two nurses: one on the day shift and one on the night shift. Your baby’s doctor will make rounds once a day, or as needed, to check your baby’s progress. After examining your child and reviewing notes from the nurses, the doctor will contact you to talk about how your baby is doing and to answer any of your questions. Feel free to call the NICU at any time to speak with your nurse. Depending on your baby’s condition, other members of your care team include:

- Respiratory therapist: Helps care for your baby’s breathing needs.
- Dietitian: Ensures that your baby gets the right nutrition.
- Occupational and physical therapists: Work on positioning, motor development and feedings.
- Social worker: Helps determine what resources are available for you and your baby, and provides emotional support to parents and families.
- Pastoral care chaplain: Provides spiritual and emotional support.
- Surgeon: Is available if needed and is specially trained.
- Pharmacist: Provides medications for your baby.
- Ophthalmologist: Examines your baby’s eyes, either in the hospital or after you are home.
- Lactation nurse: Will meet with you to talk about breastfeeding and milk supply.
- Child life specialist: Helps to prepare and support siblings of babies in the NICU.

When can I hold my baby?
Depending on your baby’s condition, we will make every effort to let you hold your baby as soon as possible. Skin-to-skin contact, also known as kangaroo care, can contribute to the health of your baby. Husbands or partners can also hold the baby this way. Ask your nurse about the benefits of kangaroo care, or see the “skin-to-skin” section under the breastfeeding tab.

When can I nurse my baby?
Your nurse and doctor will let you know when you can start nursing. Some babies are not able to nurse right away and will get nutrition by an IV or by “gavage” feeding (in which a tube is placed down your baby’s nose or mouth into the stomach). Once your baby is ready to start nursing, your nurse or lactation consultant will help you.

What if I’m far from home?
If your baby is transferred to our NICU and you live far away, our guest service center can help. We offer lodging at the Travis & Beverly Cross Guest Housing Center, located across the street from Providence St. Vincent Medical Center.

Also, staff can provide training in massage therapy and infant CPR.
Taking Care Of Mom

We know how stressful this time is, and we want to make sure you take care of yourself too. Here are some helpful ways to meet your own needs:

• Rest when you can. Giving birth is never easy, and you need time to recover too. Be honest about how you are feeling and what you need.

• It’s OK to leave. We know how difficult it is to be away from your baby. You may have other children or even need to run to the grocery store. We know you can’t be there 100 percent of the time even though you want to, and that’s OK. Feel free to call your nurse any time of the day or night to see how your baby is doing.

• Make the space your own. You can put up personal items around your baby’s area, such as cards and pictures.

• Get support. Nothing is more helpful than support from those we love. In addition, we have a parent group that meets monthly and offers support from other parents who have had a baby stay in the NICU. Here are other ways to get support:

  – Ask a family member or friend to be in charge of sending out updates to loved ones.
  – Have a family member or friend coordinate meals.
  – Have volunteers drive you to and from the NICU. (Depending on your delivery, you may not be able to drive yourself for a short period of time.)
  – Remember that your nurse is available and happy to answer any questions.
Going Home

The most common question parents ask is, “When can my baby go home?” Your baby needs to meet the following milestones before going home:

- Breathing on his or her own
- Maintaining an appropriate temperature
- Taking all feedings by breast or bottle
- Showing regular weight gain

When your baby is ready to go home, your nurse will teach you what you need to know to care for your child. You will go home with written instructions and a list of appointments with those providing care for your baby. We want to make sure your baby continues to eat well, gain weight and stay healthy.

Also, you will need a car seat that fits your infant. Most NICU babies need a car seat test before going home. This test makes sure your baby can handle the trip home with no breathing problems or other concerns.

Depending on your baby’s condition, you may be sent home with monitors or other medical equipment. If so, a member of your care team will teach you how to use the equipment.
Thank You For Your Trust!

It is our privilege to care for your baby, and we appreciate the trust you have placed in our health care team. We are here to get your baby healthy and back home with you as quickly as possible. Let us know how we can help you and your family throughout your stay. Click here to visit our NICU website.