



In the NICU, Parents Are Essential Caregivers Too

A Consensus Statement on Family Presence in Neonatal Intensive Care Units

Washington D.C. January 12

The emergence of SARS-CoV-2 has understandably altered the way we deliver neonatal care. As we navigate this global pandemic, neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) staff are challenged not just with the demands of providing expert critical care to fragile infants and families, but with doing so under extraordinary risks and ever-changing conditions.

The Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN), The National Perinatal Association (NPA) and National Association of Neonatal Nurses (NANN) recognize the unique challenges facing healthcare providers in reducing the risks of COVID-19 transmission while encouraging parent presence and engagement in care. We also re-affirm our commitment to delivering family-integrated care that promotes parent-infant attachment and supports parents' roles as primary caregivers for their infants. We believe NICU parents are "essential caregivers."

Incorporating the collective, multidisciplinary perspectives and expertise of our organizations, we've created this Consensus Statement. In it, we put forward recommendations for trauma-informed policies and practices that support family-integrated care in our Neonatal Intensive Parenting Units (NIPUs). We advocate for parents' primary role in providing essential care to their hospitalized infant. We encourage parental presence knowing its benefits for providers, families, and infants.

We recognize that our understanding of this virus changes rapidly and we acknowledge that hospital policies must change in response to unique concerns and regional developments. As we look for timely, interdisciplinary responses and solutions, our organizations advocate for the incorporation of trauma-informed care for all interactions during the pandemic and for the recognition of parents as essential caregivers for their hospitalized newborns.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gail A. Bagwell".

Gail A. Bagwell, DNP, APRN, CNS
President, NANN

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry Ballas".

Jerry Ballas, MD, MPH
Viveka Prakash-Zawisza, MD, MS, MBA
Co-Presidents, NPA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Viveka Prakash-Zawisza".

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cindy Kretling".

Cindy Kretling, MS, CNS, RNC-OB, C-EFM
President, AWHONN

www.nationalperinatal.org/COVID-19

www.nann.org/about/position-statements

awhonn.org/news-advocacy-and-publications/awhonn-position-statements

PARENTS ARE ESSENTIAL CAREGIVERS
DURING COVID-19 ... AND BEYOND

FAMILY-CENTERED CARE
Advocates that families be respected as essential members of the care team.

- We believe parents and providers are allies in care
- We recognize and respect families' priorities, values, cultures, and beliefs.
- We encourage shared-decision making and partnership in care planning.

THE PARENT-INFANT DYAD
Parental involvement in the early days and months of life supports:

- healthy cognitive development.
- secure attachment.
- self-regulation, stability, and resiliency.

FAMILY PRESENCE
Family presence during infant hospitalization promotes:

- parental attachment.
- parental well-being.
- continuity of care.

We affirm the rights of parents to provide essential care for their infant during hospitalization, given the life-long importance of parent-infant attachment.

SUPPORTING PARENTS AS ESSENTIAL CAREGIVERS
Parental caregiving during hospitalization is essential care. We encourage providers to value parental presence in the following ways:

- Promote policies and practices that prioritize parental presence and caregiving.
- Invite parent participation and input when revising policies that may limit parental presence.
- Set clear expectations. Openly and honestly communicate with families about shared responsibilities that are part of being an "essential caregiver."

AWHONN National Association of Neonatal Nurses National Perinatal Association

- awhonn.org
- nann.org
- nationalperinatal.org

Position Statement URL:

www.nationalperinatal.org/parents_are_essential

Based on the study: [NICU Experiences during COVID-19](#)

[Ashlee Vance, Ph.D., R.N., M.A.](#)

- Parents of infants hospitalized in the NICU during COVID-19 reported substantial changes to family life and greater financial instability.
- Parents' NICU experiences during COVID-19 were emotionally isolating and overwhelming above and beyond known challenges of having a baby in the NICU.

PARENTS are ESSENTIAL CAREGIVERS
COVID-19

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PARENTS are ESSENTIAL CAREGIVERS
COVID-19

When parents meet the expectations of "essential caregivers" to strictly adhere to local health directive measures they should be provided unrestricted access to their hospitalized infant.

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The Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN) www.awhonn.org is a 501(c)3 nonprofit membership organization. Our mission is to empower and support nurses caring for women, newborns, and their families through research, education, and advocacy.

The National Association of Neonatal Nurses' (NANN) www.nann.org is the professional voice and home of neonatal nurses, nurse practitioners, and clinical nurse specialists. NANN supports the advancement of the neonatal nursing profession through opportunities for neonatal nurses to influence care for neonates and their families, collaborate with leaders and peers in their field, and gain clinical knowledge to improve daily practice.

The National Perinatal Association www.nationalperinatal.org brings together healthcare providers, parents & caregivers, educators, and service providers - all driven by their desire to support and advocate for at-risk babies and families. Our shared purpose is to give voice to the needs of pregnant people, infants, their families, and their healthcare providers so that collectively we can have the greatest positive impact on perinatal care.

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