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# Preventing Infections: Information for Parents

Babies born early have more risk of needing to return to the hospital due to problems with feeding, weight gain, or respiratory infections. There are things you can do to lower these risks. The most important thing to remember is to wash your hands. Teach everyone who touches your baby about good handwashing. Be sure to have soap or hand gel by all bathroom sinks. It’s a good idea to have hand gel in any room in which you will take the baby.

Keep hand gel in purses and diaper bags, too.

## Cleaning

Give the baby’s room a good cleaning. Remove dust and dirt, but avoid the use of strong-smelling cleaners. Preterm babies don’t like strong smells and because their lungs are still growing, those smells may be irritating. This is especially true for secondhand smoke.

## Sleeping

Your baby should always be placed on his or her back for sleep. Sleeping on the back lowers the risk of sudden infant death syndrome as well as fever, stuffy nose, and ear infection.

## Friends and Family

Do not let anyone who is sick or smokes near your baby. Ask anyone who is “coming down with something” to wait to visit. Limit the number of visitors and the length of time that guests stay. Secondhand smoke can harm your baby’s lungs and increase your baby’s chances of having respiratory infection, ear infection, and hearing problems. Don’t take your baby to crowded areas (malls or church) until they have been home for several weeks. This is especially important during the winter months of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) season (October through March).

## RSV Prevention

There are ways to protect your baby. *RSV* is a respiratory virus that spreads easily from coughing and sneezing. The virus can live on countertops, doorknobs, hands, and clothing for up to 7 hours. During RSV season, wash your hands frequently and avoid crowded places and school- age children. Speak with your pediatric provider about your day care plans, too.

There also is a medicine (Synagis) that can help lower your baby’s risk of getting sick with RSV. Follow the appointment schedule given by your baby’s provider.

## Other Notes

Breast milk is the best food for your baby for the first 6 months of life. Breast milk helps your baby’s immune sys- tem fight respiratory and stomach infections.

You may see redness or small bumps on the parts of your baby’s bottom that have been near the wet or dirty part of the diaper. A poopy diaper can bother the skin. Diaper rash isn’t serious and usually heals in 3 or 4 days with care. You can prevent diaper rash by changing wet and dirty diapers every 2–3 hours.

Clean your baby’s bottom with plain water and a soft cloth. Let the area air dry before putting on an ointment and a clean diaper. If the diaper rash doesn’t get better in 3–4 days, call your baby’s provider. Ask about diaper care ointments you can buy at the store. They may want to give your baby medications that can help clear up diaper rash.