

Ensuring that your baby is kept warm after the birth

Why is this important?

If a baby becomes cold after the birth your baby can be at risk of developing hypothermia. Hypothermia is a condition where the body temperature drops to a dangerously low level. In a newborn, this occurs when the baby's temperature drops below 36.5°C.

- Mild hypothermia 36-36.5°C
- Moderate hypothermia 32-36°C
- Severe hypothermia less than 32°C

A baby with hypothermia may have problems breathing regularly and maintaining their blood sugar and may result in admission to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for treatment.

How does hypothermia happen?

Leaving the warmth of the womb at birth, the wet newborn baby comes into a much colder environment and immediately starts to lose heat. Most of this heat loss occurs within the first few minutes after birth and if not kept warm in the first 10-20 minutes, the baby may lose enough heat for their body temperature to fall to a very low level.

Is my baby at risk of getting cold?

Some babies are more at risk of getting cold, these include:

- Preterm babies born at less than 37 weeks' gestation
- Babies with low birth weight
- Babies of mothers who are diabetic
- Babies who need to be resuscitated at birth
- Babies where the mother has an infection in labour

However, all babies are susceptible to hypothermia in the first few hours after the birth, so it is important to take simple measures after the birth to keep your baby warm.

What will the staff do to ensure that my baby is kept warm?

- Ensure the temperature of the birth room is at least 24°C
 - The air conditioning and any fans in the birth room need to be turned off or facing away from the baby
 - Windows should be closed
 - Heaters turned on if appropriate
- After the birth, your baby will be dried immediately and the staff will put a hat on your baby
 - If there are additional risk factors, then staff will put a red hat on your baby to alert staff that your baby is more at risk of getting cold.
- Once your baby is dried, staff will ensure the wet towel used to dry your baby is removed and replaced with a blanket
- During skin to skin, your baby will also be covered with blankets
- You will be encouraged to have uninterrupted skin-to-skin contact with your baby, unless the staff are concerned that you are cold
- You will be encouraged to feed your baby or express your breastmilk and give to baby within an hour of birth
- Bathing your baby should wait until the baby has adjusted to the environment and maintains his temperature

- Staff will check your baby's temperature shortly after the birth to ensure that this is within the normal range

How can you help your baby?

As parents, you can help the maternity team in ensuring that your baby is kept warm. There are many things you can do to help:

- Tell us if the birth room is not warm enough. This is very important just before and in the hours after the birth. If adults (in shirtsleeves) are feeling that the temperature in the room is becoming too warm, then it is just the right temperature for the newborn baby.
 - This may mean reminding the staff to close windows and turn off the air conditioning/fans or turn up the heaters
- Ensure that when having skin to skin your baby is covered with blankets
- Ensure that your baby keeps the hat on for the first 12 hours; as much as 25% of heat loss will be from the baby's head if it is not covered
- If staff have put a red hat on your baby then please keep this on your baby for 12 hours. You can usually then remove the hat and replace it one of your own hats.
- When dressing baby for the first time warm the clothes and blankets beforehand. You can do this by placing the baby clothes against your skin or under your clothes
- When in the cot, ensure that your baby is adequately covered. Babies usually need one or two more layers of clothing or bedding than adults
- Tell us if you think your baby is not warm enough; they should feel slightly warm to touch, although hands and feet can sometimes feel a little cooler.
- Tell us if you think your baby's breathing is not normal.
 - If you notice that your baby is breathing very fast for a continuous period (more than 60 breaths per minute), or seems to be struggling to breathe, with nostrils flaring or making noises with each breath, then please tell us.
- Babies use up energy to keep themselves warm, therefore we will both encourage and support you to feed your baby regularly. Some babies may need more frequent feeds however a well-baby will need to have feeds at least every 3 hours for the first few days of life.

How long should I take these measures for?

If kept warm, once the baby is around 6 hours old, they will usually be able to maintain their temperature at a normal level. The observation of your baby's temperature will continue for at least 12 hours. Some babies that are unwell or vulnerable at the time of birth (for example a baby with a low birth weight) may need support to keep warm for a longer period of time

If you have any questions, please ask one of the midwives, neonatal nurses or support workers.

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