

Recommendations for nursing and midwifery staff in the neonatal units and maternity hospitals

Compassionate end-of-life care for babies during Covid-19



Official Recommendations from National and International Bodies

Despite medical advancements in Neonatal and Paediatric care, infant loss is still a heart-breaking daily occurrence in Irish hospitals. Sadly, some babies will not go home despite every effort to help them to get better. Babies can be seriously ill for several reasons such as being born with a medical condition or being born too early, and unfortunately, their hospital journey will end with palliative and end-of-life care.

During the pandemic, it is vital that neonatal services continue to ensure that parents and other family members can be with their baby and make precious memories as their baby's life comes to an end. Bereavement care must continue to be offered to parents and must comply with the **Health Service Executive National Standards for Bereavement Care following Pregnancy Loss and Perinatal Death**¹.

The **British Association of Perinatal Medicine (BAPM)**² recommends that

“everything possible, should be done to achieve parental presence and participation in care, even for Covid-19 positive parents”

and **we endorse this recommendation.**

Neonatal services must **maximise parental access and involvement** during palliative and end of life care while we live with Covid-19. This will enable parents to make treasured memories of their baby's short life, which will help to reduce the impact of trauma on families now and into the future as they start their journey of grief and healing.

How you can support families

The following points offer advice to staff about end of life care for babies during the pandemic. Staff can help parents by doing the following:

❖ Give parents the opportunity to make memories with their baby

Do everything possible to give the parents the opportunity to make memories with their baby in line with the **HSE National Standards for Bereavement Care following Pregnancy Loss and Perinatal Death**¹. All staff providing care should be familiar with these standards and how to implement them.

❖ Acknowledge parents' feelings and offer kind words

For example, ask the parents how they are feeling.

Find out what the parents are worried or anxious about by asking questions such as “Is that something you are worried about?” or “Is there anything I can I do to help?”

❖ **Be conscious of the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) effect**

Ensure that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) does not become a social barrier and consider *placing a laminated photo of you* with your name on the outside of your PPE.

Be mindful of your *tone of voice while wearing PPE*, ensure you can be heard, but be gentle, kind, and honest.

❖ **Communication protocol**

Ensure that the unit communication protocol outlines the communication channels for providing information to parents in addition to responding to queries for example, provide the family with the name of person that they can contact to get information about their baby.

Unit protocols should be in place to facilitate **virtual access** for families such as V-Create Skype or Facetime.

❖ **Support organisations**

Ensure that parents are provided with the contact details for the support organisations who can offer them emotional support and practical advice around this time.

❖ **If the baby dies without their parents present**

If the baby dies without their parents present, staff should tell the parents the story of the baby’s passing including the role played by each staff member. This information is part of their baby’s story and is very important to parents.

You might tell parents:

- Who was present?
- Did you read to them or sing to them?
- Were they comfortable?
- Did they open their eyes?
- How did you care for them after they died?
- How was their passing acknowledged for example, moment’s silence?
- What happened next?

You might like to send the parents a sympathy card.

More information

If you would like more information, please contact us:

- email info@inha.ie
- phone **085 1920 602** or
- log onto our website at: www.inha.ie

References

1. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/3/maternity/bereavement-care/>
2. https://hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/bapm/redactor2_assets/files/740/COVID_FAQ_06.11.20.pdf