

20th May 2020

## Network Position on Visiting Neonatal Units during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The London Neonatal ODN recognises that during the Covid-19 pandemic Trusts have quickly responded to the need to protect staff and the babies and families that they care for. Local determination for visiting and testing is entirely appropriate given that the demographic, environmental and physical conditions will be different in each unit.

The London Neonatal ODN supports the most recent <sup>1</sup>BAPM and <sup>2</sup>Bliss statements on parental involvement on the neonatal unit, and endorses the ethos that the 'mother and partner are never considered to be visitors within the neonatal unit – they are partners in their baby's care and their presence should be encouraged'.

The London Neonatal ODN recognises the importance of parental involvement on the neonatal unit. The presence of parents will aid the bonding as a family and diminish the distress experienced in these difficult time. With this in mind the network proposes the following overarching principles to support areas of common practice whilst allowing providers to safely manage staff, parents and babies during this difficult time.

### Visiting

- All units should consider adopting the <sup>3</sup>RCPCH guidance and allow visits from both parents at the same time. Parents have told us that the current restrictions of one parent only is very hard to cope with, as the partner of the mother often acts as a support to the mother.
- There is currently no guidance or evidence to suggest that restricting contact time is necessary. Therefore at least one parent should be present for as long as possible within current constraints. <sup>1,2</sup>
- While the use of video technology, such as vCreate, is a supplemental tool to help minimise the impact of separation, and whilst the ODN endorses its widespread adoption, it should not be considered a replacement for parental involvement.
- Currently there is no evidence to suggest that skin-to-skin or breast feeding is unsafe for COVID-19 negative parents and therefore should be facilitated and encouraged.
- The ODN recognises that some units may feel it is necessary for parents to wear face masks whilst they are present on the unit, this may be necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Frequently Asked Questions within Neonatal Services; A BAPM Supplement to RCPCH Guidance, Updated 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020 [FAQ Within Neonatal Services BAPM Supplement to RCPCH Guidance updated 7th May 2020](#)

<sup>2</sup> Bliss Statement: COVID-19 and Parental Involvement on Neonatal Units, Updated 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020 [Bliss Statement: COVID-19 and Parental Involvement on Neonatal Units updated 7th May 2020](#)

<sup>3</sup> RCPCH Covid-19 Guidance for Neonatal Settings; Parents and Visitors to NNU 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020 [Guidance for Neonatal Settings; Parents and Visitors to NNU](#)

where current social distancing requirements between staff and parents (and other parents) is particularly challenging.

- Parents should adhere to strict hand hygiene guidance particularly on arriving and leaving the unit and use hand sanitizer regularly when moving around the unit i.e. in parent areas.
- Mothers and partners who are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 should not be permitted to enter the unit until they have tested negative or until 7 days after the onset of symptoms and are symptom free. If the baby's father or mother's partner is symptom free, they will also need to self-isolate for 14 days. This is in line with current PHE self-isolation guidance <sup>4</sup>

### Testing

- As of 27th April, NHSE recommended testing all non-elective admissions to hospitals – in conjunction with RCPCH, we have interpreted this to include all mothers admitted in labour, but not all newborns admitted to NNUs. The rationale for this is outlined in RCPCH guidance. Depending on local prevalence of SARS-CoV-2, it may be reasonable to consider testing any baby readmitted from home, even with a non-respiratory condition (e.g. jaundice requiring phototherapy) although the risk of infection from an asymptomatic infant is likely to be very low if appropriate hygiene measures are adopted".
- In line with BAPM and guidance, units should offer the same testing protocols to parents/partners as for staff, to help minimise unnecessary separation <sup>1</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Public Health England (2020) Stay at Home: guidance for households with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection, accessed on line at [Stay at home: guidance for households with possible Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection PHE 28th April 2020](#)