

**GUIDELINES: BATHING**

Amendments			
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**ASHFORD & ST. PETER'S HOSPITAL NHS TRUST**

<b>GUIDELINES: BATHING</b>
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**1. INTRODUCTION**

The act of bathing can be a stressful event for small sensitive babies, it should only be considered if the baby is stable physiologically. Developmental care tries to reduce some of the stressors by, modifying the way we carry out bathing, considering the baby's positioning, ensuring a quiet calm environment.

**2. AIMS**

Bathing is an activity that parents can perform and is an opportunity for them to get to know their baby. With adequate support and preparation parents and babies can have a relaxing and enjoyable experience. By involving parents to carry out the bath we are developing attachment. Attachment is the close relationship that develops between parent and child, it gives the child a sense of security and enables them to go on and make successful relationships later in life.

**BATHING**

Action	Rationale
<b>Parents</b>	
If at all possible try to reserve bathing for parents. The first bath is very special so plan a suitable time with parents.	Bathing is an activity that is normal for parents to do. It can mark progress in their baby's condition. Bathing gives parents the opportunity to observe and communicate with their baby.
Remind parents that they may wish to have a camera with them.	A permanent reminder of one of their baby's firsts.
<b>Planning and preparation</b>	
Preparation begins without the baby. Discuss with parents their feelings about doing the bath. A doll can be used to rehearse and demonstrate.	If the parents are well prepared and supported will be able to participate in the first bath rather than watch the staff perform this special event. Personal and cultural influences can be respected and accommodated.

Discuss and explain the hospital guidelines on the use of skin products.	These products are not usually needed and may be unsuitable for premature skin.
Choose a time when the baby is likely to be awake and relaxed and when the parents are available.	Avoid times when the baby is upset with hunger, has recently fed or undergone a strenuous procedure.
Ensure the environment is quiet, calm and relaxed. Avoid direct light from windows or lamps.	Providing a subdued environment will help the baby remain in a relaxed awake state.
Before starting the bath, observe the baby for evidence that baby is relaxed e.g. steady breathing, good colour, and that there are no signs of stress e.g. hiccoughs, twitching or slack muscles.	The bath may have to be postponed until the baby is more able to cope with the demanding process.
Close nursery doors and ensure that the room is warm and that there are no drafts.	To maintain body temperature and reduce the need to hurry the bath.
Adjust the bath to an appropriate height for the care giver.	To promote safe handling and avoid back strain.
Position bath close to changing area.	Avoid moving baby through space as this can be distressing especially when baby is naked.
Make sure that you have everything ready e.g. cotton wool, warm water, clean nappy, clean clothes, gloves and nappy sack, warm towels and wrapping. (See nappy changing guideline)	To ensure that you are available to support the parents and baby throughout and that the bath goes smoothly.
Have the water deep enough to cover the baby's torso.	To allow the baby to float supported and move in the water.
Let the baby know you are there by approaching quietly, talking softly and touching gently before removing covers. If a change of position is necessary, do so slowly and gently, cradling with your hands.	Prepare them for something pleasant by arousing them gently with your voice and hands.

Support the baby whilst undressing e.g. side lying, someone else to help by holding the hands or feet.	Undressing can be a demanding activity and can tire the baby before the bath. Care taken can minimise this. If the baby finds being undressed difficult then consider wrapped bathing.
Check the water temperature just before the baby enters the water.	To minimise the risk of the water temperature being either too hot/cold for the baby.
<b>During The Bath</b>	
Help the baby to feel secure and avoid distress when placed in the water e.g. wrap the baby in a muslin or small towel.	Wrapping soothes the baby and helps them cope with the sudden change on entering the water.
Keep head and neck uncovered, lift the baby and tuck under your arm. Gently wash face (not eyes), neck and behind ears.	To ensure clean water is used.
Scoop up a handful of water and wet baby's head; wash the hair with gentle but positive massage movements. Dry head thoroughly.	To ensure the baby does not get cold. Some babies may not be able to cope with hair washing and bathing so it may be necessary to do them separately.
Support the baby to enter the water by holding them close to parent as they lean over the water. Move the baby face forwards.	Babies can find it stressful to be moved through the space, especially on their back and naked. Facing forward can help some babies.
Let the feet enter the water first, allowing the baby to feel the water, before slowly immersing the rest of the body. Keep your voice gentle and reassuring, proceed slowly as the baby adjusts and relaxes.	To minimise stress responses and allow the baby to adjust gradually to the change in environment.
Ensure that the baby can brace their feet on the end of the bath.	Gives the baby a firm surface to brace their feet against.
Gently unwrap one side of the wrap at a time, pause if unsettled.	Allows access to wash the baby.

Give the baby time to kick and turn in the water.	Buoyancy allows the baby to experience pleasurable movement.
Observe baby's cues e.g. yawning, hiccupping, colour and breathing changes.	Allows care giver to slow down, pause or stop the bath.
After The Bath	
Leave the wrap in the bath, support the baby while lifting them out of the bath e.g. Fold limbs into the body and lift curled in side lying position.	Having dangling limbs and sudden movements through space can be distressing.
Have a warm towel ready, wrap the baby and dry keeping baby covered throughout.	To avoid heat loss. Supports the baby by providing containment. Gentle, firm pressure is more calming than rapid rubbing or light strokes.
Consider skin to skin contact after bathing.	To help regulate body temperature and stabilise baby physiologically. Provides parents with opportunity to help their baby rest and recuperate.
Share with parents and/or staff any adverse reactions, noting techniques that supported the baby.	Care givers can anticipate difficulties and choose the most appropriate technique, timing and pacing for bathing.

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