

Glossary of Medical Conditions Neonatal Intensive Care Unit [NICU]

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Chronic Lung Disease

A condition which sometimes affects the lungs of premature infants. It reduces the ability of the lungs to take in oxygen and remove carbon dioxide waste, a process called gas exchange. Chronic lung disease can cause difficulty with the baby's breathing which is called [respiratory distress \(RDS\)](#).

Congenital

Means to be born with, or to be present at birth.

Cleft palate/lip

A cleft lip or cleft palate is a congenital malformation. Malformation means that a body part has not formed properly while the baby was still in the uterus (womb). With cleft palate/lip, it causes an opening (gap) in the lip and/or the roof of the mouth.

Congenital Heart Defect (CHD)

A congenital heart defect is a problem with the structure of a baby's heart. Heart defects can be very mild and cause no problems for babies, or the problems may be serious and need surgery to fix them. Occasionally, congenital heart defects are life-threatening.

Doctors and nurses look for the following things to tell whether a baby has a heart defect:

- a murmur – the sound heard with a stethoscope when listening to the blood flow through the heart
- cyanosis – a bluish colour of the skin, lips and/or finger/toe nail 'beds'
- [respiratory distress](#) – difficulty with breathing

Hyperbilirubinemia

An elevated level of bilirubin (yellow substance or pigment) in the blood.

- see *jaundice in NICU Medical Terminology*

Hypoglycaemia

A low amount of sugar (glucose) in the blood. There are many causes for low blood glucose in newborns including:

- being premature (born before full gestation term)
- mum having diabetes during her pregnancy
- infection hypothermia (low temperature)

Hypothermia

Lower temperature than normal body temperature (Normal is 36.5°C – 37.5°C). Babies with low temperature may be irritable (restless) or they can become lethargic (less active). Hypothermia can cause a baby's blood sugar to be too low ([hypoglycaemia](#)).

Hydrocephalus

This means that there is too much cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). This is the fluid that normally flows around the brain and spinal cord to protect it. With hydrocephalus, the fluid collects in spaces in the brain called the ventricles where it may press on the brain. It may be necessary to remove the fluid, which is called drainage of the CSF.

Intraventricular Haemorrhage (IVH)

The brain has hollow areas, called the ventricles, which are filled with cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) that normally protects and flows around the brain and spinal cord. When blood collects in the ventricles, we call it an intraventricular haemorrhage (IVH).

Meconium Aspiration

Meconium aspiration happens when a baby breathes meconium into his/her lungs. Meconium is the first poo a baby does (before or during birth) and in the lungs, can cause problems with breathing after the baby is born. This condition is called meconium aspiration syndrome (MAS).

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Meningitis

Infection of the membranes around the brain and the fluid (cerebrospinal fluid – CSF) that flows around and protects the brain and spinal cord.

Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC)

NEC is an infection of the walls of the intestines (bowel). NEC is common in premature babies because their bowels are not mature (fully developed). The infection can be serious and sometimes spreads to the bloodstream causing sepsis. Sometimes babies need surgery to remove the damaged intestines and babies with NEC may need a long time of being fed through the vein to let their intestines rest and recover from NEC. This type of feeding through the vein is called parenteral nutrition.

Newborn Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)

Newborn abstinence syndrome (NAS) is when a baby behaves in a certain way, like feeding poorly or being jittery, because she/he is withdrawing from drugs which they were exposed to while still inside mum before birth. NAS is usually caused by drugs of addiction like heroin or speed, but can happen with some types of prescription drugs too.

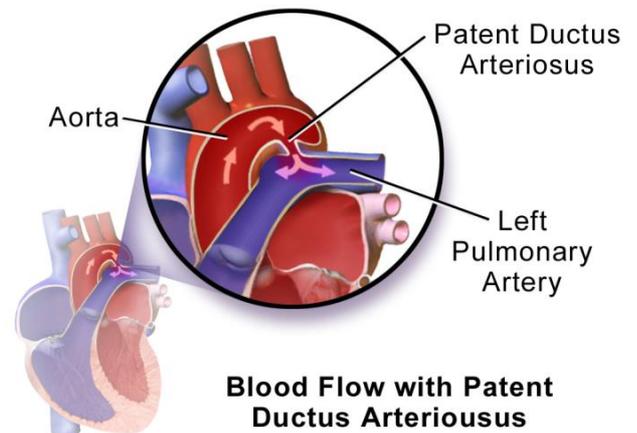
Pneumothorax

A pneumothorax is when air is found in the space between the lung and the muscle of the chest wall. The air becomes stuck there because it leaked out of the normal passageways of the lungs. The pressure of the trapped air can cause the lung to collapse, usually only part of the lung collapses but sometimes the whole lung collapses. Pneumothorax may need treatment with a chest tube.

– see *chest tube* in NICU Medical Terminology

Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA)

The ductus arteriosus is a small blood vessel that connects the large vessels carrying blood to and from the heart. The ductus arteriosus normally closes soon after birth when the baby starts to breathe. In some babies, the ductus arteriosus remains open; this is reasonably common in premature babies. An open ductus may need treatment with medication or surgery.



Blood Flow with Patent Ductus Arteriosus

Attribution

Reflux

Reflux is when milk or fluid flows from the baby's stomach into the oesophagus (swallowing tube). Reflux may cause babies to spit up or vomit.

Respiratory Distress Syndrome (RDS)

Respiratory distress syndrome is the name given to a condition which often happens to premature babies. The lungs of premature babies are not yet ready for the outside world and so they may have problems breathing for some time after they are born. Premature babies may be given a medicine called surfactant directly into their lungs by tube to help treat this problem.

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Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP)

Retinopathy of prematurity is an eye condition which can affect premature babies. In ROP, the blood vessels at the back of the eye, in an area called the retina, don't develop properly. These abnormal vessels may damage the retina, so the eyes of premature babies need to be checked regularly by an ophthalmologist (eye doctor). Treatment with a laser surgery is sometimes required to prevent damage to the eye and problems with vision.

- [see fact sheet on ROP in the tab 'Premature Babies – what do I need to know?'](#)

Tongue-Tie

A tongue tie is a thin piece of skin (called the lingual frenulum) under the tongue which connects the tongue to the floor of the mouth. Sometimes a tongue tie may stop the baby from being able to move his/her tongue properly. Tongue tie is found in 1-4% of babies. Mostly it does not cause problems, but occasionally it can be more difficult for babies to suck properly which may interfere with breast or bottle feeding. Rarely surgery is needed to cut the tongue tie. - [see fact sheet on tongue tie in the tab 'common medical problems of newborns'](#)

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