



Pregnancy Loss and Infant Death Alliance

Support :: Advocacy :: Awareness :: Education

Practice Guidelines:

When Bereaved Parents Want to Hold their Baby

Related PLIDA Position Statements:

- ❖ **Infection Risks are Insignificant:** Infection risks are insignificant for bereaved parents who have close contact with their deceased baby's body.
- ❖ **Delaying Postmortem Pathology Studies:** When bereaved parents hold their baby's body for any length of time after death, there is little or no impact on postmortem pathology studies.

Guidelines for the Bereavement Care Provider

Remember that after death, the body does not produce new pathogens. If a baby has contracted an infection before death, those pathogens may proliferate slightly after death, but in most circumstances that proliferation will pose an insignificant risk to the parents. The parents can kiss and cuddle their baby, and the parents can keep their baby with them for extended periods of many hours.

Protective clothing can be used by health care providers to prevent extended contact with bodily fluids when hazardous infection is suspected. Careful cleaning of the baby's body will protect the parents from any residual risk, and swaddling with a cloth can protect others who hold the baby. For any person who has an impaired immune system, standard precautions (gown and gloves) are advisable.

If others elect to be gowned and gloved, and parents want to know why, they can be gently informed and reassured that these precautions are to protect "outsiders" from the remote chance of infection, but that they, the parents, belong in the inner circle with their baby, and bear no risk.

Whatever the condition of the baby, touch and carry the baby with gentle caring. Your tenderness and reverence is affirming, validating, and comforting to the parents.

Delay autopsy whenever possible. When parents are able to have extended and repeated opportunities to spend time with their baby's body, the psychosocial and emotional benefits to them can significantly outweigh the benefits of prompt postmortem evaluation.

Encourage meetings between parents and the pathologist. Personal contact enables the pathologist to give the parents realistic and reassuring information about the autopsy. If samples need to be collected within 24 hours, the pathologist can assure them the baby will be well cared for and returned promptly.

Let parents know they can keep their baby with them. After delivery and until the mother is discharged, the baby's body can stay in the room with the parents as much as they desire.

Refrigeration is advised when the baby is not with the parents, in order to maintain the integrity of the skin and to reduce the normal, though minor, proliferation of any pathogens. The baby can be placed in a warming unit or wrapped in a warm blanket prior to being held by the parents.

For more information on these guidelines, please refer to the *PLIDA* Position Statements listed above.