A FREE RESOURCE FROM THE JUNIPER FOUNDATION

Preparing to Bring Your Baby Home

Checked against current guidelines by the Juniper Foundation editorial team. Not yet reviewed by a clinician.

Going home from the NICU is exciting and can feel scary. This checklist helps you prepare in the weeks before discharge. Ask your baby's nurse to go through it with you.

Getting ready to go home

Every NICU has its own process. Teams usually look at whether a baby can breathe safely, stay warm in an open crib, and feed well enough to grow steadily. Ask early: "What does our baby still need to do before going home?"

Tests your baby may have before discharge

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), common NICU discharge tests can include:

- A hearing screen
- An eye exam for retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) for babies born very early or very small
- Newborn screening blood tests for rare, serious conditions
- A blood count to check for anemia, a low red blood cell level
- For some babies, a brain ultrasound

Not every baby needs every test. The AAP also advises checking babies born early while they sit in their car seat, to make sure their breathing and heart rate stay steady. How this is done varies by hospital, so ask how your NICU does it.

Skills to practice before you leave

- Feeding your baby, and knowing how much and how often
- Giving each medicine, with the dose written down by the team
- Using any equipment, such as oxygen or a monitor

- Taking your baby's temperature
- Bathing, diapering, and safe holding
- Asking whether the hospital offers an infant CPR class
- Spending a night caring for your baby in the hospital, if your NICU offers it

Home checklist

- A car seat installed correctly before discharge day
- A safe sleep space: your baby on their back, on a firm, flat surface, with no pillows, blankets, bumpers, or toys. The AAP recommends room sharing without bed sharing for at least the first 6 months. If your baby falls asleep in a car seat or swing, move them to a flat sleep space.
- A smoke-free and vape-free home and car
- Handwashing for everyone who holds the baby, and sick visitors kept away
- Questions for your pediatrician about vaccines for family members and RSV protection for your baby
- Supplies, prescriptions, and equipment delivered and tested

Follow-up appointments

- First pediatrician visit, often within a few days of discharge
- NICU follow-up or developmental clinic, if recommended
- Eye, hearing, or specialist appointments
- Early intervention evaluation, if recommended

Call 911 or go to the emergency room if your baby

- Is struggling to breathe, has pauses in breathing, or is turning blue, gray, or very pale
- Is very hard to wake, will not wake, or is limp or floppy
- Has a seizure

Call your pediatrician right away for a rectal temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher in a baby 3 months or younger, poor feeding, or any sign that worries you. Get your baby's own warning-sign plan in writing before you leave.

Where to learn more

- Preparing for discharge
- Home care and follow-up
- Recognizing urgent illness in a newborn
- HealthyChildren.org (AAP): Common NICU discharge tests, healthychildren.org
- HealthyChildren.org (AAP): Safe sleep, healthychildren.org

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