



Commonly Used Terms in the NICU

Alveoli – Very small sacs in the lungs through which carbon dioxide and oxygen pass into and out of the bloodstream.

Anemia – a deficiency of red blood cells, which carry oxygen.

Apnea – The absence of breathing for longer than 20 seconds.

Artery – A blood vessel that carries oxygen to the body's organs.

Asphyxia – A lack of oxygen to the body's organs.

Aspiration – The taking of a foreign substance into the lungs that can cause pneumonia.

Atelectasis – The collapse of lung tissue.

Bagging – The means of forcing air into the lungs to temporarily breathe for the baby.

Blood gas – A blood test that measures oxygen, carbon dioxide and acidity of the blood

Chest tube- A small tube placed in the chest to remove air when it becomes trapped between the lungs and the chest wall to allow the lung to re-expand.

CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) - This may be applied to an infant's airway to help keep the small sacs in the lungs inflated.

Cyanosis - When the skin turns a bluish color from lack of oxygen.

Edema - An accumulation of excess fluids, swelling.

Endotracheal tube- A small breathing tube that is inserted through the baby's mouth or nose into the trachea. It is usually connected to a breathing machine called a ventilator.

Exchange transfusion - a blood transfusion used to treat very high bilirubin levels. Most of the infant's circulating blood is replaced by the same amount of donor blood.

Extubation - The removal of the endotracheal tube from the trachea.

Fontanelle - The soft spot at the top and back of the baby's skull at birth.

Gavage - Feeding with a small tube that is passed through the mouth or nose into the stomach.

Gestational age - The number of weeks the infant completed in the mother's womb.

Heelstick – Pricking the baby’s heel for blood tests.

Hypoxia – A lack of oxygen.

Intubation – The insertion of an endotracheal tube.

Kangaroo Care – Skin-to-skin contact with the baby placed on the parent’s chest for at least one hour when safe to do so.

Meconium – The infant’s first stools, which are dark and sticky.

MST - Metabolic Screening Test.

NPO- Nothing by mouth.

PDA (Patent Ductus- Ateriosus) – A hole in the circulatory system that should close soon after birth. If it’s not closed and the baby is having problems with breathing and circulation, the PDA may be treated with a medication (indocin) or it may be surgically repaired.

Pneumonia – An inflammation of the lungs.

Pneumothorax – A buildup of the air that is trapped between the chest wall and the lung, preventing the lung from expanding. This trapped air needs to be removed or resolved.

Respirator – A machine that assist with breathing (ventilator)

Sepsis – An infection in the blood.

SGA – Small for gestational age.

Spinal tap (lumbar puncture) – a diagnostic test in which a short, narrow needle is inserted between two bones in the spine. A small sample of spinal fluid is taken for testing.

Tachycardia - An abnormally fast heart rate.

Tachypnea – An abnormally fast respiratory rate.

Transfusion – The giving of blood or blood products intravenously.

UAC (Umbilical Arterial Catheter) - A small tube placed in the umbilical artery to give fluids, monitor blood pressure and sample blood.

Ultrasound – A noninvasive diagnostic test that makes pictures of the body tissues and organs using sound waves.

UVC (Umbilical Venous Catheter) – A tube placed in the umbilical vein to give fluids, medications and nutrition.

Vital Signs – These numbers include temperature, pulse, blood pressure, respiratory rate and pain level.

