Understanding and Mitigating the Impact of PostPartum Separations of COVID Positive and PUI Mothers and Their Babies After Delivery

Emily Adlin Bosk, Ph.D, LMSW
School of Social Work
Rutgers University
Wired to Connect

Infants are Socially Competent

• Neonates know mother at birth and have innate capacities to perceive changes in their environment.

• Earliest emotions are:
  • Distress
  • Joy
  • Interest

• Mother-infant communication in first few ays functions as mutually-adaptive dyadic system.

• Early mother-child interactions form basis for affective and behavioral regulation.

• Parent assists infant in regulating sleep, feeding, distress and arousal.
Right From the Start

Importance of Close Contact After Birth

• Sensitive period after birth
• Decreased neonatal crying
• Increased maternal oxytocin levels which facilitates bonding and sensitive caregiving.
• Increased positive maternal-child interactions within the first year.
• Decreased infant abandonment.
Separation in First Hours After Birth
A short event with potential long-term consequences

• Distress cry

• Reduction in maternal responsiveness and caregiving in first year of life

• Increased dysregulated and irritable child behavior at one year

• Animal studies suggest physiological impacts
Longer Disruptions

• Research on premature infants gives us window into longer term impacts of separations.

• Interruption of maternal-infant contact initiates cascade of neurobiological changes and mental states that promote connection.

• In postpartum period mothers exhibit less:
  • Looking
  • Vocalizing
  • Touch-contact behaviors

• Infants exhibit decreased social responsiveness
Postpartum Depression

A Major Risk with Separation

• Even absent illness, pandemic major stressor that increases risk for postpartum depression and anxiety

• Increased behavioral and relational difficulties at 18 months.

• Impacts infant language, motor, cognitive development
Babywearing

Kangaroo Care & Close Contact

- Improves temperature regulation
- Reduces oxygen needs
- Improves respiratory patterns
- Improves state organization
- Enhances cognitive development
- Enhances parental bonding and sense of competence
Other Mitigation Strategies

- Recordings of mother’s voice
- Facetime with neonate and mother so that mother can interact with baby in real time
- Go home with alternate caregiver
- Screen mother for postpartum depression sooner than 6 week visit.
- Screen mother-child for relational difficulties early
- Pediatricians need to be aware of separation.
Thank you!