

In No Hurry: The Advantages of Delayed Bathing for Newborns

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

Shelli Dankoff – Media Relations Coordinator

There was a time, not that long ago, when post-delivery care for a mother and her newborn looked completely different than it does today. Use to be immediately after birth a baby would be examined on a cold metal table, bathed, and then put in an incubator, separated from mom.

Today, parents-to-be arrive at a hospital with a birthing plan, and immediate skin-to-skin contact is encouraged between baby and mother, with that first bath delayed for up to a day.

Delaying a baby's first bath until 8-24 hours after birth came to the forefront several years ago through the World Health Organization. The WHO's stance: bathing a baby immediately after birth is more of a cultural phenomenon that really does nothing but create difficulties for the baby. The WHO found that early bathing actually stresses a baby out, which requires them to adapt to their new environment in a harsher manner than delaying the bath.

SOT Lynne Reiner – Obstetrics Acute Patient Care Manager – OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center

(These babies have much more stable temps, their temperatures don't drop, they stay within normal limits, and they're not stressed. They're able to stay, that golden hour with their mom between their mom's breast, they can hear her heartbeat, they can start the process of breast feeding, we just allow them to adapt to life normally so that it's a natural and more gradual thing for them and it's not nearly as abrupt. :25)

V/O: Lynne Reiner is the Patient Care Manager in the Obstetrics Acute unit at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria, Illinois and has presented at statewide conferences about the positive outcomes her staff sees. The standard on her unit is now 24 hours. They are contacted by hospitals across the country as some are just starting to implement the protocol.

The biggest plus Reiner sees for delayed bathing based on the stats she sees from her unit backs up what the WHO found - better temperature and glucose control in newborns.

SOT Lynne Reiner – Obstetrics Acute Patient Care Manager – OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center

(They've been getting that from mom the whole way through their development and now they're born, the cord's been clamped and they've lost their sugar source so they have to start to be able to metabolize and really process their energy source on their own and the more you stress them out and the more glucose they use up without replacing it the lower the sugar levels will go. So we don't want to stress them, we want them to be comfortable we want them to be able to utilize those glucose stores they do have in the first two hours of life, you know they have plenty for that as long as we don't inadvertently make them use all of that up. :38)

V/O: Reiner says keeping glucose levels up also allows a baby more time to learn to breastfeed, which also helps mom be less stressed.

While the majority of babies are able to delay a bath, there are exceptions, such as if there's an infection or safety risk for the baby. There is specific criteria staff follows and pediatricians actively participate in guiding the plan of care.

If you have a visual of the baby lying around all gooey until that bath – don't. In fact Reiner says unless you peek under the cap keeping the head warm and see matted hair, you might not even notice the vernix babies are born covered in.

SOT Lynne Reiner – Obstetrics Acute Patient Care Manager – OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center

(It's all wiped off and the dirty and wet blankets are taken away and then maybe wiped off two or three times with clean blankets and then taken away, then wrapped in clean blankets skin to skin over it, over the babies. They've still got the clean skin and pink cheeks. The only place you can really see the vernix immediately after is if you lift an arm and see it in their arm pit or some creases and within a few hours it absorbs and you can't even see it anymore. :29)

V/O: Reiner says parents have embraced delayed bathing, especially once they get past that cultural expectation of bathing the baby right away. She says people will now stop her staff if they see a bath happening and ask “is the baby 24 hours old?” She says it’s not just other staff questioning, now it’s grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Reiner also likes what this shift means for the new parents.

SOT Lynne Reiner – Obstetrics Acute Patient Care Manager – OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center

(I think it's a really nice thing for the parents because that first 24 hours mom now has the time to bond with the baby, dad does as well, the baby gets used to more of adapting to being outside the womb and what they need to do with just the breathing in maintaining their temperature and learning to eat. 24 hours mom feels a little bit better she's able to get up and be part of this where before you know, it was so soon after the baby was born and many times she would miss it and luckily we always helped the dads make sure there are pictures taken for the baby book. But now you don't have to worry about that – it's a whole family event and that's what we want it to be. :42)

V/O: Learn more about the pregnancy and birth services available at OSF HealthCare [here](#).