Measles and Newborns

Measles is a serious respiratory illness that begins with fever, runny nose, eye redness, and cough. Between the 3rd and 7th day of the illness, a hallmark symptom includes a red, blotchy rash that begins on the face and spreads over the entire body. Measles is very contagious and very dangerous to newborns, especially premature infants. To keep the infants in the NICU and Newborn Nursery safe from measles, we screen parents and visitors who reside in regions where recent measles cases have been reported.

**Measles and New York City**
The New York State Department of Health alerted all state health facilities of an ongoing measles outbreak in specific ZIP codes. Our hospital is screening parents and visitors to patients who reside in ZIP codes where there is a current measles outbreak.

**Who gets measles?**
Babies, children and adults can get measles. Measles is more severe in babies, especially premature infants.

**Are measles contagious?**
Yes, measles are highly contagious. Measles is spread through the air or by direct contact with droplets from the nose or mouth of an infected person. Infected droplets can last for several hours on a doorknob or other surface. A person with measles can spread the illness right before the fever starts up until four days after the rash appears. Being in contact with someone with measles is called a *measles exposure*.

**How long does it take to catch measles after an exposure?**
Symptoms usually begin 7-21 days after a measles exposure. The rash appears within 14 days of the exposure and lasts 5-6 days.

**Can the measles vaccine (MMR) protect you from catching measles?**
The best way to keep safe from measles is having one or two measles vaccines before an exposure. By the age of 6 years, most people have two measles vaccines. Babies in the NICU are too young to get a vaccine, so it is important that all caregivers have their measles vaccines. We use cocoon care – surrounding babies with caregivers who are vaccinated and immune to measles and other health conditions. This is the safest way to care for newborns.

**How do we treat the measles?**
While there is no specific medicine for measles virus, we use medicine and fluids to treat the symptoms of measles to reduce fever, pain, and discomfort.

**How do we protect babies in the NICU from measles?**
We ask all NICU parents and visitors who live in specific zip codes to have immunity to measles before coming to the NICU. Parents and visitors to the newborn nursery will be screened for symptoms and possible exposure to measles.

*If you have questions or concerns, please tell a member of the care team.*