

INFANTS' ENVIRONMENT

Going Outside

Fresh air and a change of surroundings are good for both you and your baby, even in her first month, so take her out for walks when the weather is nice. Be careful to dress her properly for these outings, however. Her internal temperature control isn't fully mature until the end of her first year. This makes it difficult for her to regulate her body temperature when she's exposed to excessive heat or cold. Her clothing must do some of this work by keeping heat in when she is in a cold location and letting heat escape when in a warm place. In general, she should wear one more layer than you do.

Your infant's skin also is extremely susceptible to sunburn during the first six months, so it's important to keep her out of direct and reflected sunlight (off of water, sand, or concrete, for example) as much as possible. If you must take her out in the sun, dress her in lightweight and light-colored clothing, with a bonnet or hat to shade her face. If she is lying or sitting in one place, make sure it is shady, and adjust her position to keep her in the shade as the sun moves. Sunblock is not recommended for infants under six months of age.

Another warning for the hot-weather months: Do not let baby equipment (car seats, strollers) sit in the sun for a long period of time. When that happens, the plastic and metal parts can get hot enough to burn your child. Check the temperature of the surface of any such equipment before you allow your baby to come in contact with it.

To check whether she's clothed well enough, feel her hands and feet and the skin on her chest. Her hands and feet should be slightly cooler than her body, but not cold. Her chest should feel warm. If hands, feet, and chest feel cold, take her to a warm room, unwrap her, and feed her something warm or hold her close so the heat from your body warms her. Until her temperature is back to normal, extra layers of clothing will just trap the cold, so use these other methods to warm her body before wrapping her in additional blankets or clothing.

Visitors

It's not a problem to have close friends and family hold your newborn, as long as they wash their hands first and avoid coughing or sneezing near him. Also, try not to let too many people handle him for too long. Newborns aren't necessarily more susceptible than adults to whatever bugs might be going around but they do suffer more severe illnesses when they catch routine infections. Also they are prone to over stimulation when exposed to too much handling and noise. Once they're more than a month or two old, you won't need to be so vigilant about protecting them from visitors.

Temperature

The best temperature for your home is a comfortable one (68-72 degrees). But, it definitely takes practice to be able to tell when your baby is too hot or too cold. In the early months of life, most babies have difficulty maintaining the appropriate body temperature. Because babies can easily become too hot or cold, you'll need to help them stay comfortable by using the following guidelines: If your baby is sleeping comfortably and feeding well, and is calm and not too cranky, then she's probably the appropriate temperature. You can also check to make sure that her extremities — her hands, feet, and head — are neither hot nor cold to the touch.