



# Transition from In-Person to Virtual NICU Family Classes



## Introduction

Family classes are available to all parents and families in BC Women's Hospital (BCW) Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). These group classes are organized by Patient and Family Engagement Advisors and facilitated by health care professionals with expertise in neonatal care and relevant community partners. The classes support the information and education needs of parents in the NICU, for example supporting parental involvement in the care of their baby while in the NICU, supporting breastfeeding choices and preparation for going home. Group classes also provide parents opportunities for social interaction and connection opportunities with other NICU families. Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, BCW NICU hosted in-person classes throughout the week. All in person gatherings, including BCW NICU family classes were stopped when the Covid-19 pandemic began.

## Aim

To maintain accessibility to educational classes for NICU families through transition from in-person to a virtual platform.

## Method

- A small working group composed of NICU Patient and Family Engagement Advisors, Program Manager and the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) Office of Virtual Health convened to adapt in-person group family classes to a virtual platform.
- Privacy concerns were addressed to ensure confidentiality and privacy requirements were met.
- A secure registration process was developed to ensure all participants in the virtual family classes are parents and families of NICU patients.
- Technology support developed - 2 tablets purchased for families/caregivers to borrow, 1 laptop for educators to use for teaching.
- Families were informed of these virtual classes and provided step-by-step instructions of the registration process by posters, communication from nurses, Patient and Family Engagement Advisors, and other healthcare professionals

## Tools

The image shows two screenshots. The left screenshot is the 'NICU Parent Virtual Class Calendar - May 2021', a grid showing various classes like 'Premie Brain', 'Baby Steps to Breastfeeding', and 'What is Kangaroo Care?' with their respective times and dates. The right screenshot is the 'May NICU parent class registration' form, which includes fields for name, email, and phone number, and a QR code for registration.

## Results/Family Impact

- Virtual family classes started on January 13, 2021. In the first 6 months, 58 classes took place with 118 families able to attend, for a total of 151 attendees.
- Our single family room facility has allowed both parents to remain in their baby's room throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents are able to attend virtual classes from the patient room while performing Kangaroo care (skin to skin), breastfeeding/pumping and facilitated tucking (hand hugging).
- The virtual platform increased accessibility for families to attend while simultaneously caring for their newborn.
- The virtual platform also increased the accessibility for partners to attend while outside the hospital. For example, one parent may be at home caring for other children or at work.
- Classes continued to foster connection opportunities and social interaction amongst NICU families.

## Conclusions

- Adapting to virtual classes enabled parents to continue to develop knowledge on how to support and engage with their newborn while in the NICU, while also preparing parents/caregivers for discharge.
- Increased accessibility for those who were unable to previously attend in-person classes

For more information, contact: **Cecilia Chow, Program Manager, Neonatal Program**  
[cecilia.chow@cw.bc.ca](mailto:cecilia.chow@cw.bc.ca)  
**Michelle Peltier, Patient & Family Engagement Advisor**  
[michelle.peltier@cw.bc.ca](mailto:michelle.peltier@cw.bc.ca)  
**Tom Wiebe, Patient & Family Engagement Advisor**  
[tom.wiebe@cw.bc.ca](mailto:tom.wiebe@cw.bc.ca)