

One in five parents completely separated from their preterm and sick newborn during COVID-19 pandemic

A global survey of parents' experiences shows alarming restrictions regarding neonatal care and parental access

Disruptions in neonatal care provision have led to restrictions and strict separation of parents and their hospitalised newborns – as recent survey results published in [EClinicalMedicine](#) [1] and in the [project report](#) [2] by the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI) suggest. The survey is the first to explore parents' experiences worldwide regarding neonatal care during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was led by the scientific team of EFCNI under the umbrella of the Global Alliance of Newborn Care (GLANCE).

Main findings: The magnitude of the results is alarming:

- More than half of the participating parents were not allowed to have a support person present during birth, leaving them without any emotional, informational or practical support.
- One out of five parents was never allowed to be with their hospitalised newborn.
- Fathers/partners were particularly affected by the separation policy; whereas about three quarters (75%) of the participating mothers could be present, almost half of the participating fathers/partners (44%) claimed they were not allowed any access to their baby.
- Separation policies have also limited the application of skin-to-skin contact and Kangaroo Mother Care, although these practices have been scientifically proven to be highly beneficial for the development and growth of sick and preterm born babies.
- Communication, health information and also mental health support were largely inadequate. One third of the participants was lacking information on how to protect themselves and their baby from COVID-19 transmission.
- The results show country-specific differences, which also depend on the extent of COVID-19 related restrictions (e.g. social distancing, lockdown etc.).



© Mariano Marcos Memorial Hospital & Medical Center/Rocamia Rasalan-Fermin



© Our Premature Children Foundation (OPCF)

Munich, November 2021: Through an online questionnaire (available in 23 languages), the EFCNI research team surveyed more than 2000 parents from 56 countries worldwide, whose newborn was receiving special or intensive care during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of this global online-survey was to explore parents' experiences with regard to the disruptions and restrictions on different elements of infant and family-centred developmental care (IFCDC). The participating parents shared their experiences regarding prenatal care, parental access and skin-to-skin contact, infant nutrition and breastfeeding, health communication, and mental health. The large number of participants from over 50 countries allows for a very detailed picture of the impact of the pandemic on neonatal care.

"Immediately after birth, the child was taken to a hospital 130 km away, I did not see the child after birth, no one showed it to me, no one could be with me after the caesarean section. When I was registered and wanted to go to the child, the hospital said it was forbidden to visit. I did not see my daughter for 2 months, only a few photos throughout the period. I saw the child for the first time on the day of discharge. That was a nightmare."
(Survey participant and mother of a preterm born baby)

Based on the severity of the findings, policy-makers, public health experts and healthcare professionals are requested to take immediate action. "The pandemic has shown us how fragile some of our achievements in neonatal care really are. Concepts such as Infant- and family-centred developmental care or simple practices like skin-to-skin care, which we had taken for granted, were suddenly obsolete again - worldwide. Taking a look at the findings of our survey illustrate the painful truth: every 5th parent, that is 20%, were completely separated from their hospitalised baby.", stresses Silke Mader, Chairwoman of EFCNI and founder of GLANCE. Therefore, a holistic infant and family-centred developmental care approach must be re-installed where it was discontinued, it must be promoted where it was questioned, and it must be protected where it was restricted. This is in the name of giving all newborns the best possible start in life.



**Zero separation.
Together for better care!**

Infant and family-centred developmental care in times of COVID-19 –
A global survey of parents' experiences

DIGITAL LAUNCH EVENT

Thursday, 11 November 2021
2:00-3:30 p.m. CET
Language: English

Launch event: The full project report will be launched during a digital live webinar on Thursday, 11 November 2021, 2:00-3:30 p.m. CET (English). During this event, experts, healthcare professionals, affected parents, researchers, and patient/parent representatives will share their unique insights. Register here: <https://bit.ly/3zMB3xs>

Transparency: The research was carried out in cooperation with representatives of national parent organisations, COINN (Council of International Neonatal Nurses), ESPR (European Society for Paediatric Research), NIDCAP (Newborn Individualized Developmental Care and Assessment Program), and UENPS (Union of European Neonatal & Perinatal Societies). During the conduct of this project, EFCNI received an earmarked donation by Novartis Pharma AG. The study was independently conducted by the EFCNI research team.

About EFCNI: The European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI) is the first pan-European organisation and network to represent the interests of preterm and newborn infants and their families. It brings together parents, healthcare experts from different disciplines, and scientists with the common goal of improving long-term health of preterm and newborn children. EFCNI's vision is to ensure the best start in life for every baby.

The foundation is supported by AstraZeneca, GE Healthcare, Baxter, GlaxoSmithKline, Nestlé Nutrition Institute, Sanofi Pasteur, ProLacta, Philips, Takeda, DSM, Novartis and other private companies as well as individual donors. In addition, EFCNI receives funding from the European Union's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020. For more information, please visit: <https://www.efcni.org>

About GLANCE: GLANCE is a global network that aims at reducing mortality and morbidity of babies born too soon, too small or too sick and to decrease the burden of afflicted families. It collaborates with different stakeholders to address disparities in care and policies. GLANCE develops initiatives to meet the needs of babies and their families. The vision of GLANCE is that every baby born receives the best start in life. Worldwide. For more information, please visit: www.glance-network.org/

Press contact:

European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI)
Silke Mader
Chairwoman of the Executive Board
Phone: +49 (0) 170 169 56 04
Email: silke.mader@efcni.org

References:

[1] Kostenzer, J. et al. Neonatal care during the COVID-19 pandemic – a global survey of parents' experiences regarding infant and family-centred developmental care. *EClinicalMedicine* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2021.101056>

[2] European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI), Kostenzer, J., von Rosenstiel-Pulver, C., Hoffmann, J., Walsh, A., Fügenschuh, S., Abenstein, A., Zimmermann, L.J.I., Mader, S. & COVID-19 Zero Separation Collaborative Group. Zero separation. Together for better care! Infant and family-centred developmental care in times of COVID-19 – A global survey of parents' experiences Project Report. EFCNI, Munich. 2021. https://www.glance-network.org/wp-content/uploads/Content/Downloads/ZeroSeparation/COVID-Report/ZeroSeparation_FullReport-1.pdf

Note: Images may be used free of charge provided the copyright is acknowledged.