

Nursing Alert

The cardinal signs of respiratory distress in a newborn include tachypnea, nasal flaring, grunting, intercostal retractions, and cyanosis.

Maintain a Stable Body Temperature

Conserving the newborn's body heat is an essential nursing goal. At birth, a major cause of heat loss is **evaporation**, the loss of heat through moisture. The amniotic fluid that bathes the infant's skin favors evaporation, especially when combined with the cool atmosphere of the delivery room. Heat loss through evaporation is minimized by rapidly drying the skin and hair with a warmed towel and placing the infant in skin-to-skin contact with the mother, covered by a blanket.

Another major cause of heat loss is **radiation**, the loss of heat to cooler solid objects in the environment that are not in direct contact with the infant. Loss of heat through radiation increases as these solid objects become colder and closer to the infant. The temperature of ambient or surrounding air has no effect on loss of heat through radiation. This is a critical point to remember when attempting to maintain a constant temperature for the infant because even though the temperature of the ambient air is optimal, the infant can become hypothermic.

An example of radiant heat loss is the placement of the crib close to a cold window or air-conditioning unit. The cold from either source will cool the crib walls, and subsequently, the body of the neonate. To prevent this, place cribs as far away as possible from exterior walls, windows, and ventilating units. Heat loss can also occur through conduction and convection. **Conduction** involves loss of heat from the body because of direct contact of skin with a cooler solid object. Placing the infant on a padded, covered surface and providing insulation through clothes and blankets rather than directly on a cool hard table can minimize heat loss. Placing the newborn skin-to-skin with the mother on her chest or abdomen immediately after delivery is physically beneficial in terms of conserving heat, as well as fostering maternal attachment and breastfeeding.

Convection is similar to conduction except that heat loss is aided