

Tips for Parents by Parents

Navigating the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU)

What is the PICU?

The Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) is designed for the care of the critically ill child, ages newborn – 22 years, who requires intensive monitoring. There are five rooms with 3 beds, one room with 2 beds, and 3 isolation rooms in the PICU. In addition, the PICU includes “step-down” beds designed for children requiring less intensive monitoring. Frequently, children in the step-down area are being prepared for transfer from the PICU.

What happens in the PICU?

Each day, your child is assigned a nurse who is responsible for his or her care. Your child's doctor and nurse will share with you whatever information is available and try to answer your questions clearly. The bed assigned to your child is based on your child's condition. Your child may be moved within the PICU or transferred to one of the general pediatric units at any time. The physician in charge and the nurse manager will determine the area in which your child will receive care. Your child's heart rate, blood pressure, oxygen level, and breathing will all be monitored on a screen above the their bed. There will be “leads” or stickers on the chest and belly that allow us to do that. These monitors do not hurt the patient and are needed to monitor your child's condition at all times.

What do parents / visitors need to know when visiting the PICU?

We encourage you to participate in the care of your child whenever possible. Parents are welcome in the PICU any time, day or night, for as long as they wish. However, you may be required to step out of the room for the following activities:

- Morning and afternoon rounds. Morning rounds begin at 8:00am and continue through 11am. Afternoon rounds begin at 5pm.
- Procedures
- Special circumstances, as indicated by the health care team

Only visitors can be at the patient's bedside at any one time. There are loveseats that open up in length at every bedside and you may sleep/rest there. Comfortable sleeping arrangements are also available for one parent or parent designee in the quiet room. Sleeping in the bed with your child is not permitted. School age children can visit a sibling in the PICU. Please notify your nurse prior to the visit. Siblings need to be well prepared beforehand for what they will see and hear. **All parents and visitors must wash their hands upon entering the unit and before touching any patient each time.** Washing your hands before and after you touch your child is the most important way you can help prevent the spread of infection. All patients on the unit will have a “Code Alert” bracelet on them. This is a special device that will cause an

alarm to go off if the patient leaves the unit. Please do not disturb this bracelet; may cause a false alarm.

Are cellphones permitted in the PICU?

No, cell phones are not permitted in the PICU.

Can my child have comfort items from home in the PICU?

Yes. Suggested items are stuffed animals, special blankets, and posters. Movies and games may also be brought from home, and there is a television and phone at each patient's bedside. A VCR/DVD and video games are also available from the nurse's station. Please note flowers and balloons are not permitted in the PICU for safety reasons.

Does the hospital provide meals for my child? Can my child have food from home?

The hospital kitchen provides three meals a day to your child, if medically cleared. Please make sure your doctor and nurse are aware of any special dietary request/restrictions (Kosher, Hallal, Vegetarian, etc.). If you have brought food from home (as approved by your child's doctor) please make sure it is labeled with your child's name and date on it and placed in the lounge refrigerator. A pantry equipped with a microwave and an ice machine are located within the unit.

Is there somewhere in the PICU for parents/visitors to eat?

A parents' lounge is available for your use. We encourage you to use this room to take a break or have your meals. Vending machines for soft drinks and snacks are located adjacent to the lounge as a courtesy to the families of children in the PICU.

What additional amenities are available for parents/visitors?

We have provided a telephone in the parents' lounge for outgoing local calls and 1-800 credit card calls. Pay telephones are located adjacent to the elevators. Bathroom facilities are located outside the parents' lounge.

What additional services are available to my child?

A Child Life Specialist (CLS) is a professional who is trained in child development and is available to help families and patients during their stay in the hospital. The Child Life Specialist meets every child in the PICU and receives a patient census every morning. The CLS can help prepare your child for procedures, tests, or new diagnosis. They provide age appropriate education about illnesses, information on how it impacts your child's life, and different ways of coping with their illness. A music therapist and NYC Board Certified school teacher are also available to assist patients in the PICU. Child Life Services will set up appointments for patients, if appropriate.

ABOUT THE FAC: The Komansky Center Family Advisory Council (FAC) is a group of dedicated parents and family members of pediatric patients who are committed to working with the Hospital staff and pediatric administration to provide family-centered care to all of the pediatric patients. If you would like to find out more about the Family Advisory Council, please call us at (212)746-6007.