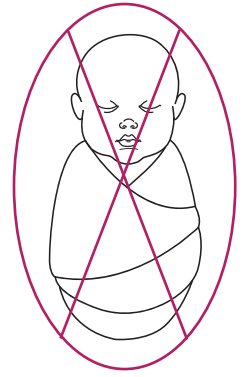# Swaddling:
Important information for Parents and Health Care Providers

What is Swaddling?

Swaddling is tightly wrapping and restricting a baby's movement. It is often promoted as a way to calm fussy babies, or a way to get babies to sleep longer. Some hospitals still routinely swaddle newborns or teach parents how to swaddle, which can make them think swaddling is important. However, research outlines many risk factors to swaddling which can affect breastfeeding, growth and development and baby's safety while sleeping.

Swaddling Risks Include:

Interference with Breastfeeding

- Babies who are placed skin to skin immediately after birth will use their hands and arms to help them find mom's breast and successfully breastfeed for the first time – if they are swaddled, they are only about half as likely to breastfeed right away.

- Babies that are swaddled show delayed feeding behaviors, and suckle less competently at their first feeding. This can lead to a reduction in milk supply.

- Swaddled babies gain weight more slowly because they are less able to signal hunger cues (ie. bringing their hands to their mouth), and are less aware that they are hungry. This results in missed feeding cues, delayed or missed feedings, and can lead to a reduction in mothers milk supply.

Decreased skin-to-skin contact (SSC)

- Babies who are exposed to skin to skin and not swaddled are calmer and cry less than babies that are swaddled. Skin to skin contact also promotes interaction and bonding. Babies are also more likely to breastfeed exclusively and longer if skin to skin is done. Research also shows that swaddled newborns have poorer circulation and lower body temperature than babies who are held skin to skin.

Increased risk of respiratory infections

- Swaddling, especially tight swaddling, can increase the risk of respiratory infections and pneumonia in babies.

Increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

- More frequent night wakings are actually protective against SIDS, and are normal behaviours for infants. When compared to babies who are not swaddled, swaddling resulted in less arousal, less alert activity, more drowsiness and more sleep. Once a baby is able to roll over, it is very dangerous to swaddle them for sleep. A swaddled baby on their stomach has a 12.99% increased risk of SIDS. Blankets can also pose a danger as they can become loose, posing a risk for infant safety and possible increased risk of SIDS.

Increased risk of hip dysplasia

- Developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH) is a disorder that can improve or worsen as a baby develops, depending on how it is managed in the first months of life. Swaddling a baby with its legs extended can increase the risk of DDH, especially when the legs are not free to bend and flex. For this reason, any clothing or wrapping on the lower half of a baby's body should be loose enough to allow baby free movement.

Increased risk for overheating

- A swaddled baby can also be at risk for overheating, especially if their head is covered. Skin-to-skin contact has been shown to help babies regulate temperature better than swaddling.

*Some studies have shown that there may be some benefits to swaddling infants who are premature, very low birth weight, or who have brain injuries. Parents of these infants should talk with their physician about swaddling with regards to their individual circumstances.

If you do choose to swaddle your baby:

- Only swaddle your baby to settle them from crying. For the baby's safety do not swaddle them for sleeping.
- Keep the wrapping loose so hips and legs are free to move, baby can breathe easily, and hands can reach mouth for self-comforting and hunger cues
- Keep the wrapping lightweight and off the head to avoid overheating and/or suffocation
- Stop swaddling when baby is able to roll over, and always position baby on their back when swaddled
- Use swaddling sparingly, and spend plenty of time skin-to-skin with your baby.