Impact of Compliance with Infection Control Protocols on Infections in Neonatal Intensive Care Units: Review Article

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ABSTRACT
Background: Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICUs) care for the most vulnerable patient population, premature and critically-ill neonates, who are highly susceptible to healthcare-associated infections (HAIs). These infections represent a major cause of morbidity, mortality, and increased healthcare costs. Over the past decades, infection prevention and control (IPC) guidelines issued by international bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have been emphasized as essential strategies to mitigate these risks.
Objective: This review aimed to critically analyze the current evidence regarding adherence to infection control guidelines in NICUs and its impact on infection prevalence, patient outcomes, and healthcare system burden.
Methods: We searched PubMed, Google Scholar, and Science Direct for the epidemiology of NICU-related infections, common pathogens and the effectiveness of IPC measures such as hand hygiene, personal protective equipment (PPE), device-associated infection bundles, antimicrobial stewardship, and staff training programs. A narrative literature review was conducted using peer-reviewed studies, systematic reviews, and global surveillance reports published in recent years. Evidence was synthesized to highlight The writers evaluated relevant literature references as well. Documents written in languages other than English have been ignored. Papers that were not regarded as significant scientific research included dissertations, oral presentations, conference abstracts, and unpublished manuscripts were excluded.
Conclusion: Evidence consistently demonstrated that strict adherence to infection control protocols significantly reduced the incidence of bloodstream infections, ventilator-associated pneumonia and urinary tract infections in NICUs. Units with strong compliance to IPC guidelines report up to a 40–50% reduction in HAIs, improved neonatal survival, decreased antimicrobial resistance, and shortened hospital stays. Conversely, poor adherence is linked to higher infection rates, antimicrobial resistance, prolonged hospitalization, and increased economic burden. The literature strongly supports that adherence to IPC guidelines, which is a cornerstone of neonatal care. Effective implementation requires continuous staff education, adequate nurse-to-patient ratios, rigorous auditing and feedback systems, and integration of antimicrobial stewardship programs. Sustained compliance not only enhances neonatal safety and survival but also alleviates the financial and emotional burden on healthcare systems and families.
Keywords: Infection control, Neonatal intensive care unit, Healthcare-associated infections, Adherence, Patient safety.

INTRODUCTION
Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) remain a major challenge in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) worldwide. Premature and critically-ill neonates are at high risk due to immature immune systems, prolonged hospitalization, and frequent exposure to invasive procedures such as mechanical ventilation, central venous catheterization, and parenteral nutrition. Their vulnerability arises from underdeveloped skin barriers, immature immune responses and reliance on devices that bypass natural defenses. Frequent use of broad-spectrum antibiotics further disrupts normal microflora and promotes antibiotic resistance. The NICU environment—with high patient density, complex equipment, and frequent handling by multiple providers—amplifies transmission risks [(1-3)].

Epidemiological data highlight the urgent ned for prevention strategies. Globally, 15–30% of NICU admissions are affected by HAIs, with rates differing sharply between high-income and low-to-middle-income countries due to variations in infrastructure, staffing, infection control resources, and protocol implementation. In resource-limited settings, overcrowding, inadequate staff training, limited access to single-use devices, and poor hand hygiene facilities contribute to higher infection rates. In Egypt, studies report 21–28% rates, particularly for late-onset sepsis and central line-associated bloodstream infections (CLABSIs), reflecting challenges faced by many middle-income countries where healthcare systems are expanding but resource constraints persist [(4-6)].

The most common NICU infections include bloodstream infections, ventilator-associated pneumonia (VAP), urinary tract infections, and necrotizing enterocolitis. Bloodstream infections, especially late-onset sepsis after 72 hours of life, are most frequent and severe. Key pathogens include coagulase-negative Staphylococci (notable for biofilm formation on devices), Escherichia coli, Klebsiella pneumoniae, Staphylococcus aureus, and Candida species. These infections often arise from invasive procedures, colonization, or lapses in aseptic technique. Clinical presentations are typically subtle, complicating early recognition. The rise of multidrug-resistant organisms further increases mortality and complicates treatment [(7-8)]. The economic burden of NICU infections is substantial. They prolong hospital stays by 8–19 days

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and add $25,000–$60,000 per episode in treatment costs, including nursing care, diagnostics, antimicrobials, and potential surgery. Beyond acute care, costs extend to long-term rehabilitation, specialized outpatient services, and ongoing family expenses such as lost wages and travel. Complications—including neurodevelopmental delays, cerebral palsy and chronic pulmonary disease—impose lifelong societal costs [(9-10)]. To address these challenges, organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have developed evidence-based guidelines. These emphasize hand hygiene, device-associated infection prevention bundles, antimicrobial stewardship and environmental control measures. Their success depends on scientific rigor and adequate resources, staff training, organizational commitment and continuous monitoring [(11-12)].

Epidemiology of Healthcare-Associated Infections in NICUs

Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) in NICUs follow a complex epidemiological pattern shaped by host factors, environmental reservoirs, and transmission pathways. Key neonatal characteristics—gestational age, birth weight, congenital anomalies, and required medical interventions—strongly influence infection risk. Extremely preterm infants (< 28 weeks of gestation) and very low birth weight infants (<1500 g) represent the highest-risk groups, with infection rates exceeding 40% in some populations. Timing of infection onset provides epidemiological insights: Early-onset infections (≤ 72 hours) are usually maternally transmitted, while late-onset infections are healthcare-associated, often linked to environmental factors and medical devices [(13)].

The chain of infection model outlines six components: Infectious agents, reservoirs, exit portals, transmission modes, portals of entry and susceptible hosts. All six NICUs are present: Immature neonates as susceptible hosts, diverse (often resistant) pathogens, reservoirs in colonized patients and the environment, and transmission facilitated by frequent handling and shared equipment. Breaking any link in this chain can prevent infection [(13)]. Surveillance data showed persistent challenges but also the effectiveness of systematic prevention efforts. Infection rates vary globally, reflecting differences in resources, implementation of prevention practices, and surveillance systems. High-income countries report lower rates due to established programs, while resource-limited settings face higher burdens. Nonetheless, successful interventions have been documented across diverse healthcare systems. A five-year retrospective study in a Chinese tertiary hospital found Gram-negative bacteria increasingly dominant, with higher antimicrobial resistance, reflecting global shifts in neonatal infection epidemiology. Gram-negative infections are especially concerning for their multidrug resistance and severe outcomes. Globally, CLABSI rates range from 0.8 to 10.5 per 1,000 central line days, depending on resources and adherence to protocols [(14-16)].

Prevalence varies by infection type, patient profile and region. Late-onset sepsis affects 20–25% of extremely preterm infants, with mortality >15%, underscoring the need for prevention in settings where treatment is limited by resistance and neonatal fragility. Ventilator-associated pneumonia occurs at 2.7–10.9 per 1,000 ventilator days, influenced by patient characteristics, ventilation duration, and prevention bundle use. CLABSIs affect 1–5% of very low birth weight infants but are among the most preventable HAIs with strict insertion and maintenance protocols. Though less frequent, urinary tract infections may cause bacteremia and are often catheter-associated. These infections disproportionately affect neonates < 28 weeks or < 1,000 g, highlighting the urgency of targeted prevention strategies [(17–19)].

Impact of educational interventions on infection control compliance

Educational interventions have demonstrated significant effectiveness in improving infection control practices and reducing infection rates in NICUs across diverse healthcare settings and resource environments. The success of educational programs depends on multiple factors, including the comprehensiveness of the curriculum, the engagement of clinical leadership, the frequency and format of training sessions and the integration of education with practical skill development and competency assessment. Effective educational programs typically incorporate multiple learning modalities, including didactic presentations, hands-on demonstrations, simulation-based training, and case-based discussions, allowing healthcare providers to apply infection control principles to real-world scenarios. The most successful programs also include regular refresher training, competency assessments, and ongoing performance feedback to ensure sustained adherence to best practices. Additionally, effective programs recognize the importance of addressing technical knowledge, behavioral factors, organizational culture, and system-level barriers that may impede optimal infection control practices. A study demonstrated that systematic hand hygiene education in a developing country NICU increased compliance rates from 46% to 69%, resulting in a 50% reduction in nosocomial sepsis rates from 96 to 47 per 1,000 patient-days. This landmark study demonstrated that even in resource-limited settings, well-designed educational interventions could substantially improve both process measures (hand hygiene compliance) and clinical outcomes (infection rates). The intervention included structured training sessions, visual reminders, performance feedback and engagement of clinical leadership, illustrating the importance of multimodal approaches to behavior change. This study highlights the critical importance of sustained educational programs in resource-limited settings [20].

More recent research has confirmed these findings across diverse healthcare settings, with studies consistently demonstrating that well-designed educational interventions can significantly improve infection control knowledge, attitudes, and practices among healthcare providers. The effectiveness of these interventions appears to be enhanced when they are tailored to specific clinical contexts, address identified knowledge gaps and incorporate adult learning principles that emphasize active participation and practical application. Successful programs also recognize the importance of addressing different learning styles and professional roles with specialized training modules for physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, and other healthcare team members. An educational intervention study at Zagazig University NICUs demonstrated significant improvements in healthcare providers' knowledge and adherence to infection control standards. Their intervention included pre- and post-training assessments, structured competency evaluations, and ongoing monitoring of adherence to infection control protocols. The study demonstrated sustained improvements in both knowledge and practice, suggesting that educational interventions can achieve lasting behavior change when properly designed and implemented. Similarly, another study showed that educational interventions could effectively improve NICU nurses' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions regarding evidence-based practices such as kangaroo mother care, demonstrating the broader potential for educational interventions to improve multiple aspects of neonatal care quality [6,21].

The effectiveness of educational interventions appears to be enhanced when combined with multimodal approaches that address multiple levels of the healthcare system. These comprehensive interventions typically include individual-level education, team-based training, system-level improvements, and organizational culture change initiatives. The most successful programs also incorporate principles of quality improvement methodology, including systematic measurement, rapid-cycle testing of interventions, and continuous refinement based on performance data. The WHO-supported "Geneva Model" implemented across multiple centers achieved approximately 50% reductions in ICU-acquired infections, including methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infections, through comprehensive programs incorporating education, feedback, and environmental modifications. This model has been successfully adapted and implemented in diverse healthcare settings worldwide, demonstrating the scalability of evidence-based educational interventions. The Geneva Model emphasizes the importance of leadership engagement, multidisciplinary collaboration, and sustained organizational commitment to infection prevention [22].

Device-associated infection prevention

Device-associated infections remain a major source of HAIs in NICUs, with central line-associated bloodstream infections (CLABSIs), ventilator-associated pneumonia (VAP), and catheter-associated urinary tract infections ranking among the most serious complications. Neonates are particularly susceptible because of their frequent reliance on invasive devices, the prolonged duration of device use, and the limited treatment options for resistant organisms. The pathogenesis of these infections reflects a combination of microbial, host, and device-related factors. Invasive devices provide a surface for microbial adherence and biofilm formation, which shields pathogens from immune defenses and antimicrobial therapy. They also bypass natural protective barriers and create portals of entry for pathogens, while local tissue trauma from insertion or maintenance further impairs host defenses. To address these challenges, prevention bundles have emerged as systematic, evidence-based strategies that reduce infection risk by simultaneously targeting multiple points of vulnerability [23].

CLABSI prevention bundles typically emphasize meticulous hand hygiene, maximal sterile barrier precautions during insertion, chlorhexidine skin antisepsis, careful selection of insertion sites appropriate to neonatal anatomy, and daily reassessment of catheter necessity with prompt removal when no longer needed. Each component addresses a specific mechanism of infection, and their combined use has been shown to significantly reduce bloodstream infection rates. For example, one NICU reported a 45% reduction in CLABSI incidence after implementing a comprehensive bundle that incorporated the core measures and structured staff education, competency assessments, and ongoing performance monitoring. These results highlight the importance of combining technical measures with sustained implementation strategies [24]. More recent research emphasizes that sterile technique must be rigorously maintained during both insertion and ongoing maintenance. Emerging evidence points to the importance of optimal dressing change intervals, rigorous hub disinfection, and strategies to preserve system integrity. For neonates, additional considerations include careful selection of catheter size, insertion techniques adapted for small anatomy, and maintenance protocols appropriate for gestational age. Sustaining improvements requires continuous education and monitoring, as compliance with prevention practices often declines over time without reinforcement [16].

VAP prevention in NICUs requires further adaptation because of the unique physiology of preterm and critically-ill neonates. Smaller airway caliber, higher metabolic demands, and greater susceptibility to respiratory compromise make this population particularly vulnerable. The pathogenesis of VAP involves aspiration of contaminated secretions, biofilm formation on endotracheal tubes, and impaired clearance of airway secretions. Evidence-based prevention bundles adapted for neonates include maintaining head-of-bed elevation when clinically appropriate, conducting daily assessments of readiness for extubation to minimize ventilator exposure, and providing oral care with chlorhexidine using concentrations and techniques tailored to age. Additional measures, such as prophylaxis for peptic ulcer disease and deep vein thrombosis, are applied when clinically indicated but must be carefully adapted for neonatal physiology. Implementation remains challenging, as clinicians must balance individualized positioning strategies, safe but effective oral care methods and the risks of early versus delayed extubation [25].

Recent studies emphasize that VAP prevention is most effective when embedded within multidisciplinary approaches that include neonatologists, nurses, respiratory therapists and infection control specialists. Family involvement has also been identified as valuable, as parents can contribute to oral care and positioning under supervision. This strengthens infection prevention efforts and empowers parents, enhances family-centered care, and improves parental satisfaction [18].

Antimicrobial stewardship Programs

Antimicrobial stewardship programs (ASPs) play a crucial role in infection prevention and control, particularly in addressing the growing challenge of multidrug-resistant organisms that threaten the effectiveness of available therapeutic options. In the NICU setting, antimicrobial stewardship is particularly critical due to the frequent use of broad-spectrum antibiotics, the limited therapeutic options available for neonatal patients, and the potential for long-term consequences of antimicrobial resistance. The goals of neonatal antimicrobial stewardship extend beyond simply reducing antibiotic use to include optimizing therapeutic outcomes, minimizing adverse effects, including the development of resistance, preserving antibiotic effectiveness for future patients, and reducing healthcare costs associated with antimicrobial therapy and its complications. Effective ASPs require multidisciplinary collaboration involving neonatologists, clinical pharmacists, infection prevention specialists, microbiology laboratory personnel, and nursing staff, all working together to ensure optimal antimicrobial decision-making. These programs aim to optimize antimicrobial use while minimizing adverse outcomes, including the development of resistance, through systematic approaches to prescribing, monitoring and discontinuing antimicrobial therapy [26].

Effective ASPs in NICUs incorporate several key components that address different aspects of antimicrobial decision-making throughout the patient care continuum. Prospective audit and feedback involved regular review of antimicrobial prescriptions by clinical experts, with timely recommendations for optimization based on clinical presentation, microbiological data and pharmacokinetic considerations. Formulary restriction and preauthorization help ensure that broad-spectrum or expensive antimicrobials are used appropriately, with oversight by specialists when indicated. Education and guideline development provide healthcare providers with evidence-based tools for antimicrobial decision-making, including empirical therapy recommendations, de-escalation protocols, and optimal treatment durations. Collaboration with infection control programs ensures that antimicrobial stewardship efforts are coordinated with broader infection prevention initiatives, creating synergistic effects on reducing both antimicrobial use and infection rates. Additionally, effective programs include robust surveillance systems for monitoring antimicrobial use patterns, resistance trends, and clinical outcomes, providing data necessary for continuous program improvement and adaptation to local epidemiology. Comprehensive guidelines for implementing antimicrobial stewardship programs emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and continuous monitoring of both process and outcome measures. Their guidelines address specific considerations for special populations, including neonates, and provide practical tools for program implementation and evaluation [27].

The impact of ASPs on infection rates has been demonstrated in multiple studies across diverse healthcare settings, with evidence showing that effective stewardship programs can reduce both antimicrobial resistance and infection rates, while maintaining or improving clinical outcomes.

The mechanisms by which ASPs reduce infections include reducing selective pressure for resistant organisms, minimizing disruption of normal microbial flora, reducing the risk of antibiotic-associated complications such as Clostridioides difficile infection, and promoting more targeted therapy that may be more effective than broad-spectrum approaches. Research showed that appropriate antimicrobial stewardship could significantly reduce sepsis rates in NICU settings while also addressing the broader challenge of antimicrobial resistance. Their work demonstrated that stewardship interventions could achieve the dual goals of improving clinical outcomes and reducing resistance, challenging the misconception that antimicrobial stewardship might compromise patient care through restricted antibiotic access [28].

Organizational Factors and Infection Control

The success of infection control in NICUs is strongly shaped by organizational factors that define the environment in which care is delivered. These include staffing patterns, workload distribution, physical environment design, institutional culture, leadership commitment, resource allocation, communication systems, and quality improvement infrastructure. Sustainable improvements in infection prevention require addressing these organizational dimensions, as individual behavior changes are unlikely to succeed without supportive systems. Well-functioning organizations foster adherence to infection control practices, while poorly structured ones undermine even highly motivated providers [29].

Adequate nurse-to-patient ratios are particularly critical in NICUs, where the technical complexity of procedures and the vulnerability of patients demand meticulous care. Evidence consistently showed that higher nurse staffing levels are associated with reduced infection rates, better adherence to evidence-based practices, and improved outcomes. Mechanisms include greater time for proper hand hygiene, more reliable aseptic technique maintenance, enhanced invasive device monitoring, earlier recognition of infection signs, and reduced provider fatigue and burnout. Ratios of 1:1 or 1:2 for critically ill neonates are widely recommended, reflecting both expert consensus and empirical evidence of improved outcomes. However, sustaining these ratios requires substantial organizational commitment and resources, which can be particularly challenging in systems with nursing shortages. When staffing is inadequate, infection control protocols are more likely to be compromised, raising the risk of transmission and adverse outcomes [29].

The design and maintenance of the physical environment also play a central role in supporting infection prevention. Environmental factors influence infection risk through ventilation systems that affect airborne pathogen transmission, surface and material choices that determine cleaning and disinfection effectiveness, workflow patterns shaped by spatial layout, and the placement of hand hygiene facilities. Modern NICU designs prioritize single-patient rooms, which reduce cross-contamination, alongside conveniently located sinks and dispensers, advanced ventilation and filtration systems, and clear separation of clean and contaminated zones. These features enhance infection control by supporting staff adherence to best practices and minimizing opportunities for microbial spread. Yet, their effectiveness depends on proper maintenance, consistent cleaning protocols, and staff compliance with workflow designs [30].

Quality improvement initiatives

Quality improvement (QI) methodologies have been effectively applied to infection prevention in NICUs, achieving sustained reductions in infection rates through systematic process optimization and outcome measurement approaches. Unlike traditional research, QI emphasizes iterative testing of interventions in real-world settings, rapid cycle improvement, and continuous adaptation based on performance data. Successful initiatives typically share core features: Clearly defined goals and outcomes, systematic measurement of process and outcome indicators, strong multidisciplinary team engagement, use of improvement science tools such as Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles, and long-term monitoring to ensure sustained gains. Their effectiveness lies in focusing on system-level change rather than individual behavior, fostering continuous learning and actively involving frontline staff in identifying and overcoming implementation barriers [31]. One QI project targeting necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) prevention illustrates the value of this approach in addressing complex, multifactorial conditions. By combining multidisciplinary collaboration, ongoing measurement and feedback, family engagement and both technical and adaptive solutions, the project achieved significant reductions in NEC rates. This demonstrates how QI can align diverse stakeholders around evidence-based prevention strategies and achieve durable improvements in neonatal outcomes [19].

Collaborative networks such as the Vermont Oxford Network extend the impact of QI beyond individual institutions by facilitating the sharing of best practices and standardizing protocols across multiple centers. These collaboratives create benchmarking, peer comparison and collective problem-solving platforms, enabling organizations to identify improvement opportunities and adopt successful strategies more rapidly. By fostering data sharing and building communities of practice, they accelerate the spread of effective interventions and support sustained improvement in infection control across diverse healthcare settings [31].

Economic impact of infection prevention

The economic benefits of infection control in NICUs extend beyond treatment savings to encompass healthcare system efficiency, optimized resource use and improved long-term patient outcomes. Comprehensive economic evaluations must account for direct medical costs, indirect societal costs and intangible burdens such as pain and suffering. While infection prevention requires upfront investment in staff training, monitoring systems and quality improvement infrastructure, these costs are offset by significant returns, often realized within a short timeframe. Understanding the economic case for prevention is critical for guiding sustainable program design and securing institutional support [9].

A cost-benefit analysis of NICU infection prevention interventions found that hospitals implementing comprehensive bundles could save approximately $1.2 million annually through reduced length of stay, decreased need for diagnostics and medications, lower intensive care utilization, and fewer long-term complications. Importantly, most programs achieved positive returns on investment within 12 to 18 months, making infection prevention an attractive strategy for healthcare organizations aiming to align clinical outcomes with financial sustainability [9].

Economic evaluations must consider both direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include extended hospitalization, antimicrobial therapy, diagnostic testing, and added nursing requirements. Indirect costs, often greater in magnitude, include family burdens such as lost wages, travel expenses, and caregiving demands, as well as societal costs related to long-term disabilities, developmental delays, and special educational needs. Preventing even a single severe infection can yield lifetime savings that far exceed prevention program costs, underscoring the strong cost-effectiveness of systematic infection control initiatives [10].

Global perspectives and implementation challenges

Implementation of infection control guidelines varies across healthcare systems and resource settings, requiring adaptation of evidence-based strategies while maintaining essential principles of prevention. Global differences in infrastructure, workforce capacity, and organizational structure create unique barriers that must be addressed through flexible, context-specific approaches. The main challenges in high-income countries with established systems include sustaining adherence to complex protocols, balancing competing priorities, and continuously improving mature programs. In contrast, low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) often face more fundamental obstacles such as limited infrastructure, resource shortages, and workforce constraints. Despite these challenges, effective programs have been implemented across diverse settings, underscoring that strategies can be adapted to different environments with appropriate tailoring [32, 33].

In LMICs, barriers frequently include inadequate funding for infection prevention supplies, staffing shortages and high turnover, limited training opportunities, competing healthcare priorities, unreliable electricity and water supplies, and insufficient surveillance capacity. Addressing these barriers requires innovative, cost-conscious strategies. Successful initiatives have emphasized adapting interventions to local contexts, engaging local leadership, leveraging partnerships with international organizations, and prioritizing high-impact, low-cost measures such as simplified hand hygiene protocols, resource-adapted prevention bundles, and educational programs designed for diverse provider backgrounds [32–34].

A systematic review of neonatal infection prevention in LMICs highlights both effective interventions and critical barriers. The review emphasized the importance of tailoring interventions to local realities, fostering stakeholder ownership, ensuring ongoing provider training, and creating sustainable financing mechanisms. Reported successes included simplified surveillance approaches functional in low-capacity laboratories, targeted education initiatives, and the adaptation of evidence-based bundles to resource constraints. These examples show that maintaining core principles of infection prevention is possible even in settings with limited infrastructure when interventions are designed with feasibility in mind [34].

Recent World Health Organization guidance offers updated recommendations for preventing and managing serious bacterial infections in infants aged 0–59 days, with particular attention to resource-limited settings. Recognizing that prevention may be more feasible and cost-effective than treatment where advanced diagnostics and therapeutics are scarce, the guidance promotes simplified diagnostic strategies, adapted treatment protocols to address limited antimicrobial options and improved access to essential infection prevention supplies. These recommendations reinforce the global priority of strengthening preventive measures as a foundation for neonatal infection control [12].

Emerging challenges and future directions

Several emerging challenges continue to shape infection control in NICUs, requiring sustained vigilance and adaptation. The rising prevalence of multidrug-resistant organisms (MDROs) has intensified the need for robust surveillance, isolation protocols and antimicrobial stewardship. An outbreak of vancomycin-resistant Enterococci in a NICU underscores the critical role of molecular detection and comprehensive infection control strategies. The emergence of such pathogens demands specialized approaches that can strain existing resources. Comparative research evaluating hand hygiene versus barrier precautions for preterm infants colonized with multidrug-resistant Gram-negative organisms highlights ongoing questions about the most effective strategies for preventing transmission in these high-risk populations [35].

Environmental factors are also gaining attention, as climate control and environmental management increasingly influence infection risks in healthcare facilities. Rising temperatures and humidity shifts may alter microbial ecology, making facility design and environmental regulation essential components of infection prevention strategies. At the same time, technological innovations are expanding the toolkit for infection control. Automated hand hygiene monitoring systems, advanced environmental cleaning methods and rapid diagnostic testing offer opportunities to strengthen prevention while reducing staff workload.

Studies examining the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of NICU providers toward MDRO prevention suggest that integrating technological solutions with established protocols can address compliance gaps and improve outcomes [34].

Family-centered care has also emerged as a critical component of infection prevention. Practices such as kangaroo mother care not only support optimal neurodevelopment but also contribute to reduced infection risk by stabilizing infants and promoting exclusive breastfeeding. Recognizing families as active partners in infection prevention reflects an important evolution in NICU care, emphasizing collaboration between providers and parents to optimize safety and health [33].

CONCLUSION

The evidence clearly demonstrated that rigorous adherence to infection control guidelines is highly effective in reducing healthcare-associated infections in NICUs. Successful programs depend on comprehensive approaches that integrate staff education, standardized procedures, adequate resources, organizational support, and continuous monitoring. Although implementation barriers remain, particularly in resource-limited settings, the clinical and economic benefits of effective infection control more than justify the required investments.

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