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**TITLE:** Covid-19 on the neonatal intensive care unit: An unique opportunity to study the effects on parental-child bonding and a restrictive visitor arrangement

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### ABSTRACT (upto 300 words)

#### Background and objectives

Parental-child bonding is a hard to grasp, but important entity in the field of pediatrics and neonatology. Due to the Corona pandemic and the associated safety measures, we had to drastically adjust our visitor arrangements in the hospital. This single-center prospective study investigated the influence of a restrictive visitor arrangement in the NICU on the parental-child bonding.

#### Methods

We recruited thirty parental couples of preterm children born at postmenstrual age (PMA) of 25+4 to 37+3 weeks. During the restricted visitor policy only one parent at a time was allowed to visit and kangaroo the baby with a time restriction of 3 hours per day for each parent. Fourteen couples were recruited during the restricted visitor's policy in April 2020. Sixteen couples were recruited in the following period with the non-restrictive policy for parents. This non-restrictive policy meant that there were no time restrictions for parental visits and the parents were allowed to visit their baby together. The parents filled in two questionnaires, the Dutch Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire (PBQ) and the Dutch Edinburgh Parental Depression Scale (EPDS), at one week post-partum (T1) and again at the child's age of four months (T2).

#### Results

We found a significant difference ( $p=0.019$ ) in PBQ scores between the restrictive visitor group and the non-restrictive visitor group, with lower

scores in the non-restrictive group. Representing a better parental-child bonding. This difference between these groups was not found at 4 months of age.

#### Conclusion

We conclude that a restrictive visitor policy on the NICU has a negative effect on the early parental child-bonding. Further investigations into the effects of the early parental-child bonding in childhood and adolescence are needed.

### BIOGRAPHY (upto 200 words)

Anouk van Loo graduated from UZ Brussel in 2021 for her specialism as pediatrician. After graduating she started at Zuyderland MC Heerlen as a general pediatrician. With 3 publications on her name, she is at the beginning of her scientific career.

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