

[Huntington Memorial Hospital](#) > [About Us](#) > [Newsroom / Media](#) > [Huntington Memorial Hospital Becomes First in California to Use Wrap-Around Cooling Blankets in NICU](#)

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Huntington Memorial Hospital has become the first hospital in California to acquire wrap-around cooling blankets for use with babies at risk of brain damage. The blankets are used to induce hypothermia, a treatment that may prevent or minimize the consequences of brain injury in newborns.

Traditional flat cooling blankets lay under the patient. Conversely, Huntington Hospital’s new “CureWrap” blankets wrap around the baby’s body and can be positioned as needed. Most importantly, the blankets allow parents to hold their babies in their arms during the treatment, which typically lasts four days. With flat blankets parents are not allowed to hold their babies because their body warmth would transfer and interfere with the treatment.

“When a baby suffers a traumatic brain injury, the body responds in certain ways that can often make the injury more severe,” said Jamie W. Powers, MD, the medical director at Huntington Hospital NICU.

“Hypothermia may limit some of these harmful responses and improve the outcomes for these tiny patients. Now with our CureWrap blankets, babies and parents are more comfortable and the cooling process is more precise.”

Another advantage of CureWrap is that babies are covered up. “With a traditional cooling blanket the infant cannot be swaddled or blankets placed over, so they’re really left exposed,” said Dr. Powers.

CureWrap blankets can also be used in ambulances or helicopter transport, decreasing the time between diagnosis or birth and proper cooling. Huntington Hospital provides emergency transport services by ambulance or helicopter, 24 hours a day, seven days a week with highly trained neonatal transport team delivering medical support during the journey. The blankets and their accompanying CritiCool control units are made by Mennen Medical and are used throughout Europe and Asia. A few dozen hospitals in the United States are currently using the CureWrap/CritiCool system, but Huntington Hospital is the first in California.