

# MOMTROVERSY: ARE 'DON'T TOUCH' SIGNS FOR BABY A GREAT IDEA OR OVERKILL?

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(ABC NEWS)- If there's one thing that can make a new mom extra nervous, it's a sick baby.

So it's no wonder that many moms take extra precautions when it comes to keeping germs at bay. Extra hand washing, hand sanitizer, requesting visitors to remove their shoes in the house: it all seems reasonable enough.

But what about an actual sign requesting the baby not be touched? Good idea or overkill?

It turns out moms have a range of opinions when it comes to hanging a "don't touch" sign on baby's stroller or car seat. And for moms that want one, there's a range of Etsy shops selling ones that are almost too adorable to resist.

Johanna Ackerman is one such seller and runs the website Tags 4 Tots. She initially created the tags, she told "Good Morning America," when her nephew was born with holes in his heart that would require surgery.



"My sister-in-law was very concerned with germs and infection before he was strong enough for his surgery and the best way I knew to support her was through creating a sign that did the speaking for her," she said.

"After creating this first design, I heard from multiple moms on social media that they'd love to have one and so I began creating signs by hand on Etsy to help mothers like my sister-in-law."

The issue became even more personal when she had her own kids.

Her son, Harrison, was born 10 weeks early and immune compromised. She used a preemie no touching sign to limit his germ exposure. Her twin daughters also arrived early.

But at 2 years old, Harrison was diagnosed with B-Cell ALL Leukemia.

"While he's in a fragile state now, I take calculated risks to keep him safe and help maintain a high quality of life," Ackerman said. "I believe that's how all new mothers feel. While the signs aren't a silver bullet, they help keep folks that mean well from accidentally doing harm. Not to mention, they help keep new mothers a little bit more sane in an otherwise insane time."

For Pearl Brady, whose infant son is not immune compromised, the sign she hangs on her six-week-old son's stroller sets boundaries.

"People need to learn that they can't touch people without consent, especially other people's babies," Brady said. "It's not just about germs, it's about building boundaries."

Not everyone agrees. Several moms believe the signs are overkill.

"Exposure to these very things make our babies healthy, resilient and socialized," Monica Abend said. "And, yes, when its flu season and strangers come a swarming, swat away... but remember exposure is amazing on many fronts."

### **So what do the experts say?**

The March of Dimes has similar signs through its NICU Family Support program, which educates families on keeping babies away from germs after they leave the NICU, among other things.

"Because babies who have been in the NICU are more likely than other babies to get sick, it is very important to limit their exposure to germs," said Melissa Gehl, March of Dimes director of NICU Innovation. "One very effective way to do this is to put a 'please don't touch me' sign on their stroller, so that well-meaning people in grocery stores, shopping malls, or other places in the community don't spread germs by touching the baby."

### **And what about for babies who have not been in the NICU and don't have a compromised**



## **immune system?**

The signs are still a fine idea, said Dr. Edith Bracho-Sanchez, a pediatrician in California.

"The signs may be a little off-putting to some, but parents with newborns know everyone wants to touch and hold their babies," she said. "If this brings parents peace of mind people will pause, without having to ask them to pause every time, then I support it."

Newborns get some immunity to the germs in the world from antibodies moms pass along through the placenta and through breast milk. They don't receive the first full round of vaccinations until they're 2 months old. Beyond that, we take any infection in a newborn very seriously because the barrier from their blood to their brain has not closed yet, meaning infections can spread and have serious consequences.

"All of that said, a vaccinated adult who doesn't have any symptoms of infection and has washed his or her hands is good to hold baby in my book," Bracho-Sanchez told "GMA." "And parents can definitely start relaxing the rules after the first few months of life."