OSCE checklist for umbilical cord care

An OSCE checklist for umbilical cord care covers washing hands, checking the cord stump and skin around it, keeping it clean and dry, folding the nappy below it and teaching the parent which signs to report.

OSCE checklist for umbilical cord care: steps to practise

1. Wash your hands, introduce yourself, confirm the baby's identity with the parent and explain what you will do.
2. Check the cord clamp is secure and the cord is not bleeding.
3. Look at the cord for colour, smell and discharge, and the skin around the base for redness or swelling.
4. Keep the cord clean and dry and leave it open to air or loosely covered by clothing, not bandaged.
5. If the cord is soiled, clean it gently with clean water and dry it well. Apply any antiseptic only if your national or local policy says.
6. Fold the nappy below the cord stump so it does not rub or become wet.
7. Explain that the stump will dry and fall off by itself in the first weeks.
8. Teach the parent to wash their hands before and after touching the cord and not to pull it.
9. Teach the signs that need urgent help: redness spreading onto the skin, pus, a bad smell, bleeding, or a baby who is unwell, feeding poorly or has a high or low temperature.
10. Wash your hands, record the cord condition and what you taught, and report any sign of infection or bleeding to the midwife or doctor.

What candidates commonly forget

- Applying substances without a policy reason
- Covering the cord with a wet nappy
- Pulling the stump
- Not teaching warning signs

- Not washing hands before and after

Local policy comes first

This is our own practice checklist. Your college, hospital or country may do some steps differently. Where local policy and this list disagree, follow local policy. Some national programmes use antiseptic on the cord and others use dry cord care, so check yours.

Practise the hands-on steps with a classmate or in a skills lab, because an AI patient cannot watch your technique. You can practise the talking part with an AI patient, and try one station free with no sign-up. Next, try Midwifery: Newborn physical examination at 30 hours. Back to the OBG nursing OSCE page: OBG nursing OSCE, or see the full OSCE checklist list.

Common questions

What is the OSCE checklist for cord care?

Wash hands, check the clamp, stump and skin, keep it clean and dry, fold the nappy below, teach the parent about handwashing and warning signs, record and report concerns.

How long does the cord take to fall off?

It usually dries and falls off by itself within the first few weeks.

What if there is a bad smell?

Report it the same day. A bad smell, pus or spreading redness may show infection.

Sources

- WHO pocket book of hospital care for children
- NICE NG194: postnatal care

Checked 2026-11-13. Fees and rules change, so confirm them with the regulator before you book.