



# NISTAR Team unavailable SOP

<b>SETTING</b>	Service wide
<b>FOR STAFF</b>	All staff
<b>PATIENTS</b>	All patients

## Introduction

NISTAR currently operate with four clinical teams and have access to three NISTAR ambulances during the day, and two clinical teams with access to two NISTAR ambulances at night. However, there are ongoing significant gaps in the clinical rota and no out of hours neonatal cover, meaning that a NISTAR team is not always available. The following arrangements set out the actions that should be taken to provide contingency cover should this situation arise.

### NISTAR Team Core Hours:

Neonatal NISTAR	8am to 8pm – 7 days (from 01.01.2026 no out of hours neonatal cover)
Paediatric NISTAR	24 hours per day – 7 days
Adult NISTAR	24 hours per day – 7 days
Nurse led NISTAR	8am to 8pm – 7 days

## Objective

To provide the region with guidance should a NISTAR clinical team be unavailable.

## Scope

The SOP applies to those affected by NISTAR clinical teams being unavailable.

## Procedure

At times there are gaps in the provision of the service across all four teams and there is currently no out of hours neonatal cover. When this occurs, the following should be considered:

- Referrals should continue to come in through the SPOC number (028 9504 0167) and also on Encompass through the inpatient consult to NISTAR (the SPOC number should not be used for out of hours neonatal referrals unless it is a cardiac transfer or transfer to PICU but an inpatient consult to NISTAR should always be raised) – between the hours of 8am to 8pm a call handler and a co-ordinator will be available and out of hours a member of staff in the clinical area will be available. They will offer guidance on the below steps.
- Discussion between referring and receiving units regarding optimisation of care with the aim of holding the patient until the NISTAR team is available to complete the transfer.
- The referring unit complete the transfer themselves with advice from the receiving unit.
- Regional NICU on-call consultant advice available on 028 9615 0570/0571/0572
- The referring unit should contact NIAS on 028 9040 4080 option 1 (999 for time critical) to request an ambulance. If available, a NISTAR ambulance may be used to expedite the process, subject to ambulance availability, team commitments and journey time.



- Consideration should be given to using an alternative NISTAR team to assist with transfer if within their parameters e.g. a larger child by the Adult NISTAR team.
- On all occasions when NISTAR are unavailable to undertake a transfer this should be recorded with the NISTAR SPOC 028 9504 0167 (excluding out of hours neonatal transfers) and the inpatient consult to NISTAR on Encompass should always be completed. The referral should also be recorded and escalated appropriately through local arrangements e.g. DATIX/intertrust.

Clinical teams should consider the following points when deciding on which of the above options is the most appropriate method of transport:

- Is medical air required? (The NIAS babybus has medical air, however frontline NIAS ambulances do not)
- What is the patient condition? (Does the patient require an emergency transfer, or can the transfer be delayed without compromising patient care?)
- What equipment is required?
- Where is the patient being transferred from / to? Is this a relatively short journey or is it likely to be protracted?

Each Trust has a responsibility to maintain Critical Care Transfer equipment locally and to ensure that staff are regularly trained in its use.

NISTAR offer training opportunities locally and regionally (see website for details [www.nistar.hscni.net](http://www.nistar.hscni.net)).

Information on the availability of the NISTAR team is shared with the commissioners, CANNI, NNNI, Child Partnership (for onwards distribution across the Trust points of contact), BHSCT senior management team and recorded on the Child Health Partnership SharePoint monthly.

Weekly updates are sent out to update on weekend cover every Thursday.

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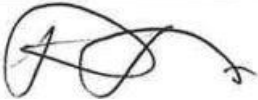

**Regulation / Guidelines / References**      N/A

**Related documents**                              Appendix 1 – Considerations for using the “Babybus”

**Abbreviations**                                      NISTAR - Northern Ireland Specialist Transport and Retrieval  
SPOC – Single Point of Contact

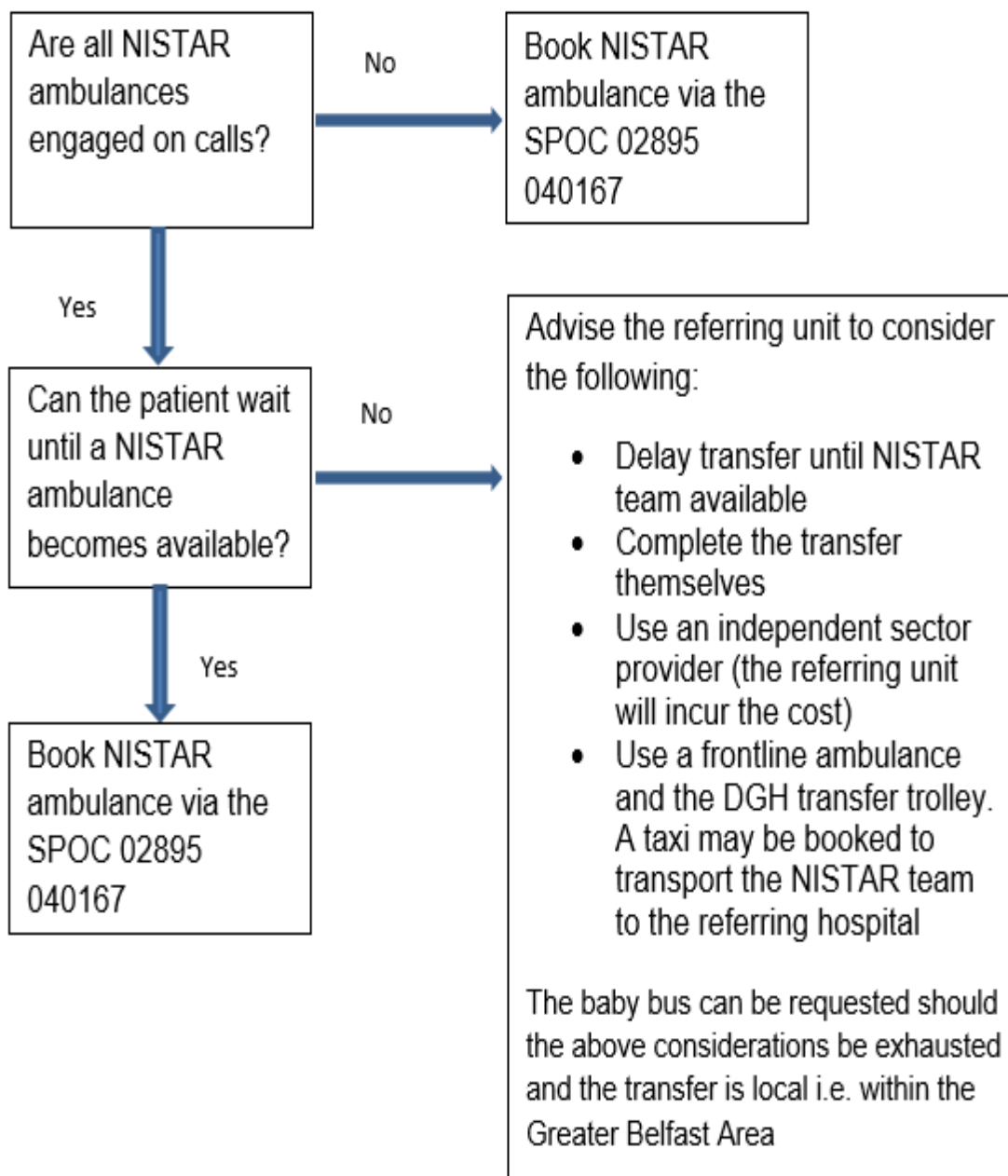
**Revision History:**

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## Appendix 1. Considerations for using the “Baby Bus”

NISTAR work in partnership with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS). NIAS provide three ambulances staffed by Ambulance Care Attendants (ACAs) 0800-2000 and two ambulances 2000-0800. On occasion, when all the NISTAR ambulances are in use but there are still calls pending, the team can use the “baby bus”. Before requesting the baby bus, the following should be considered:





## **Guiding notes**

NISTAR do not commission the baby bus and using this vehicle is on a good will basis.

The baby bus team have their own workload and as such should only be requested for local calls i.e. calls within the Greater Belfast area. The Greater Belfast area includes hospitals within the Belfast Trust catchment area and both Antrim and the Ulster Hospitals.

The workload of the baby bus will always take priority and as such the baby bus may not always be available for NISTAR to use.

The Ambulance Care Attendants (ACAs) crewing the baby bus may not always be familiar with the NISTAR equipment.

The baby bus is equipped with medical air.

The baby bus crew are controlled by the Non-Emergency Ambulance Control room (NEAC). To request the baby bus, the SPOC should ring 028 7134 7134

When using the baby bus, all equipment should be secured appropriately using the straps and / or webbing system.