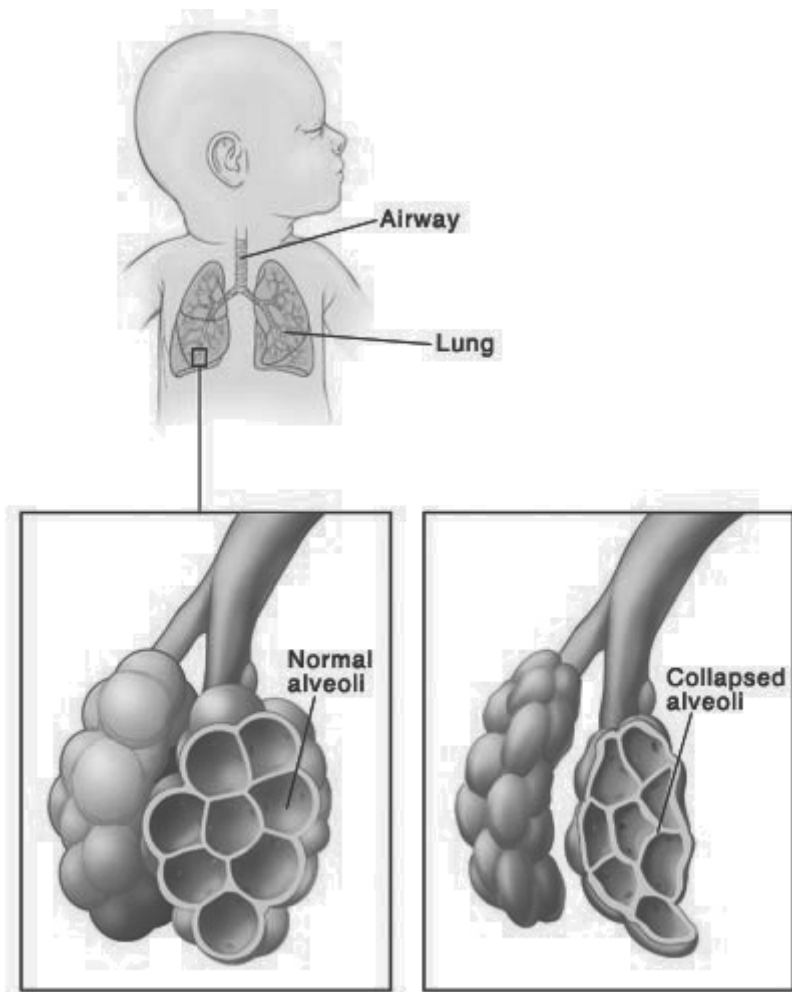


## Respiratory Distress Syndrome (RDS) in the Premature Infant

RDS is a breathing problem common in premature infants. Many babies born at under 34 weeks gestational age have some RDS. Your baby may be cared for in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) or in another part of the hospital. This sheet will help you understand your baby's care.



**Air travels through the airways (tubes in the lungs) to the alveoli (air sacs). Normally, alveoli stay open after each breath. RDS occurs when alveoli collapse after each breath. This means the baby has to work harder to breathe.**

### What Causes RDS?

RDS occurs because the lungs have not developed fully enough to produce a substance called **surfactant**. This substance is needed for normal breathing. When fresh air is breathed in, it travels through airways in the lungs to tiny air sacs (alveoli). Oxygen passes from the air sacs into the bloodstream. Waste air is then breathed out. Normally, surfactant helps keep the alveoli open after exhaling. That way, fresh air can be breathed in easily. But if the lungs contain little or no surfactant, the