

Early Childhood Health Centres – How can they help?

If you're the parent of a baby or toddler, it's good to get to know your Early Childhood Health Centre. These centres provide many free services for families with children under the age of five. Your first contact may be while you're pregnant or soon after you have your baby.

What services do Early Childhood Health Centres provide?

These centres have Child and Family Health nurses who can check your baby's health. If you have any concerns about your baby, your small child, yourself or your family, these nurses can help. They can also give information on caring for babies and young children, including advice on

- breastfeeding
- coping with sleeping and crying
- your baby's growth and development
- immunisation
- safety
- good ways to play with your baby or toddler
- your own wellbeing

Besides Child and Family Health nurses, there are other health professionals available through Early Childhood Health Centres. They include social workers, psychologists, speech therapists, and physiotherapists specialising in children's problems.

Why not just take my baby to the doctor?

It's important to have a family doctor for your baby, but you should also see your Child and Family Health nurse for regular checks on your baby's development. The nurse can also

- spend time talking to you, and provide support
- tell you about other services in your local area
- let you know about any groups for parents in your language

Why do I need the Early Childhood Health Centre if my baby is well?

It's better to prevent problems with regular checks rather than get help once the problem has started. The nurse will also help you plan for the next stage in your baby's development – what to expect when you start feeding solid foods, for example. The nurse can also listen to any concerns you may have about your baby or yourself.

How do I contact the Early Childhood Health Centre?

The staff at the hospital where you have your baby will ask you which centre you would like to visit. They will make sure you have all the information you need to contact the centre before you go home. You can also find centres listed in the phone book under Early Childhood Health Centres.

What if I can't speak English?

The hospital will organise an interpreter for your first contact with the Early Childhood Health Centre. At your first visit, the Child and Family Health nurse will arrange an interpreter for your next appointment. You can ring the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) if you need to contact the Early Childhood Health Centre.

What do I need to do have ready for my appointments?

- Your Personal Health Record (sometimes called the "Blue Book") given to you in hospital when you have your baby. This is used by the nurse (and your family doctor) to make notes about your baby's health and progress.
- A clean nappy for your baby.

Where will the first appointment be?

Many Early Childhood Health Centres do home visits. The Child and Family Health nurse will let you choose where you would like to have your first appointment. Some families like the nurse to visit them at home for their first appointment – it can be difficult to get out of the house if you're pregnant or have a new baby. An interpreter can come too.

If you need help making phone calls in English, ring the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450.

You can find more health information in your language on the Multicultural Communication website at <http://mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au>

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.