

## Maternal and child health services

If you are expecting a baby or have just become a new parent, a maternal and child health service can help you. It is a free primary health service for all Victorian families with children from birth to school age.

The maternal and child health services work in partnership with families, communities and health professionals with the focus being on prevention, promotion, early detection and intervention of health and wellbeing concerns of young children and their families.

### Maternal and child health centres throughout Victoria

There are maternal and child health centres in every local government area in Victoria, which are jointly funded by state and local governments and usually managed by local government. The centres are staffed by highly qualified maternal and child health nurses, with support from a range of other health professionals.

### Support when you go home

Your local maternal and child health service will be a great source of support after your baby is born. The hospital will notify your local service and the nurse will contact you during your first days at home to arrange an appointment. This is usually a visit in your home.

During the home visit, the nurse will give you the location of your nearest centre, information about further visits and services, and how to contact a maternal and child health nurse at any time.

### What maternal and child health centres provide

Visiting your local centre with your child helps identify issues and concerns in your child's health and development early in life, so that steps can be taken to deal with them.

Maternal and child health nurses can:

- Give information, support and advice on a variety of topics, including parenting, child health, development and learning, child behaviour, maternal health and wellbeing, child safety, immunisation, breastfeeding, nutrition and family planning
- Monitor your child's growth and development in a series of one-on-one consultations at specific times in your child's early years
- Help with sleeping, feeding and behaviour problems
- Organise parents' groups where you can get information and have the chance to meet other parents in the local area
- Tell you about other local support services
- Organise additional activities based on your family's needs, for example, arrange home visits
- Help to contact specialist services if necessary, such as early parenting centres
- Offer additional support and services to families experiencing difficulties.

### Typical visiting schedule

There are particular times when a review of your child's health, learning and development is recommended. These include:

- Following discharge from hospital (home visit)
- At two weeks of age
- Four weeks
- Eight weeks
- Four months
- Eight months
- One year
- 18 months
- Two years

- Three and a half years.

Families are able to access the service at other times by telephone or through a centre visit. Most centres offer a range of times when families can access the service, and typically operate through scheduled appointments, open consultation sessions and some after-hours appointments.

### **The Child Health Record**

Parents of all babies born in hospitals are given a free booklet called the Child Health Record. Always take it with you when you go to the health centre, doctor's surgery or dentist, and get health professionals to complete entries after each visit. It should also be used to record immunisations. If you keep your child's booklet up to date, it will be an important record of their development from birth to adolescence.

### **After-hours service**

The Maternal and Child Health Line is a 24-hour telephone service staffed by qualified maternal and child health nurses. The telephone line provides over-the-phone information, advice and referral to all families with young children. An interpreter service is available. The service is also available to hearing impaired callers who have access to a telephone typewriter (TTY).

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Your local council
- The Maternal and Child Health Line Tel: 132 229 – available 24 hours a day for the cost of a local call throughout Victoria
- Parent Line Tel. 132 289
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) Tel. 03 9419 3000

### **Things to remember**

- The maternal and child health service is a free service available to all Victorian families with children under six years of age.
- Participating in the maternal and child health service helps identify issues and concerns in a child's health and development early in life, meaning that steps can be taken to deal with them.
- After-hours services include the Maternal and Child Health Line, a 24-hour telephone service staffed by qualified maternal and child health nurses.

### **This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

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