

What the Experts Say

Well-Child Care

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WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

Parents want to make sure their children are healthy. Well-child care helps parents and physicians promote a child's overall wellness, growth, and development. Well-child care provides opportunities to screen for diseases, give vaccines, and encourage good nutrition and lifelong habits that result in a happy, healthy, and well-adjusted child. Following the well-child care visit schedule is very important. Children who do not receive well-child care are more likely to use emergency department services and to have avoidable hospitalizations.^{1,2} Many children have far fewer well-child care visits to the doctor than recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).³

6-300

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Well-child care provides quality, age and developmentally appropriate health care to children from birth to 18 years of age. This type of care allows pediatricians to supervise the health of children to prevent disease and injury and to promote healthy practices for children and adolescents. Well-child care is preventive health care especially designed for children. Preventive health care focuses on disease prevention and health maintenance using a variety of methods such as early diagnosis, health education, screening tests, and the identification of at-risk groups. The overall goal of well-child care is to lower mortality, to reduce morbidity and disability, promote full growth and development, and ensure long, productive lives for children.^{1,3,4}

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Well-child care consists of regularly scheduled checkups. These are considered preventive visits because they are scheduled on regularly occurring times throughout childhood and not just when the child is sick. Well-child care visits include:

- Opportunities for parents to ask health-related questions
- Formal development and behavior testing (autism screening, developmental milestones, or psychosocial testing)
- Measurements (length, height, weight, BMI, blood pressure)
- A full, unclothed physical exam
- Screening tests (vision, hearing, hemoglobin)
- Vaccines
- Guidance on nutrition, behavior, and development

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Not all of these are done at every well-child care visit. The type of exam during a particular visit depends on the child's age and the well-child care visit schedule. For younger children, the well-child care visit schedule includes immunizations at each visit. Through preventive assessments and screenings, well-child care helps to detect and treat diseases before they cause significant health problems.^{1,3,5-7}

Well-child care is for all children. For children who are healthy, growing and developing appropriately, receiving competent parenting, and not showing signs of significant health problems, the visit focuses on disease screening, vaccines, and health promotion. Additional visits are scheduled if the child is having health issues. Developmental, psychosocial, and chronic healthcare issues require frequent counseling and treatment visits to specifically target a particular issue. These visits are separate from well-child care visits as they often do not address the same health concerns. Parents can talk to their child's pediatrician or primary care physician to schedule well-child care appointments.⁵

Parents benefit from well-child visits too⁴:

- They gain reassurance about their child's health.
- They get answers to child rearing questions.
- They receive approval of parenting skills from the physician.
- They establish a trusted source of care for times when their child is sick.
- They feel good about following expected social norms.

Parents using a Medical Home are more likely to form a partnership with the child's physician and have higher rates of well-child visits.⁸ A medical home is the use of a one medical provider to provide accessible, continuous, and comprehensive medical care.

As with other aspects of child rearing, father involvement in well-child care is encouraged by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Barriers to father involvement in well-child visits include the quality of the relationship with the child's mother, fathers' assumption that taking the child to the doctor is the mother's job, and having appointments scheduled during working hours.⁹

Failure to Use Well-Child Care

Failing to use well-child care limits the physician's ability to recognize potential problems, address parental concerns, administer vaccines, and provide guidance on injury prevention, nutrition, and health maintenance. Children without a regular source of care are more likely to use emergency department services and have higher hospitalization rates.^{1,2}

Unfortunately, many parents do not adhere to the well-child care visit schedule. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends 14 well-child care visits between birth and 5 years.¹⁰ The completion rate for well-child care is very low. On average, only 61.4% children attend all the scheduled well-child care visits.⁷ Additionally, 56% of children ages birth to 18 years did not go to a well-child visit during a 12-month period.³

Many factors affect a family's ability and willingness to use well-child care. Families with health insurance are more likely to use well-child care than families who do not have insurance or families with intermittent insurance coverage. Public insurance users are less likely to use preventive services than private insurance users. Because overall well-child care compliance rates are low and insurance coverage for all children is increasing, additional social, cultural, and economic factors influence compliance rates.^{2,4,11,12}

Other factors affecting well-child care include increased distance to medical facility, urban or rural status, region of the US, family income, citizen status, age of the child, lack of a regular source of care (i.e. Medical Home), parent misinformation, parent work schedule, long waiting room times, care perceived as unresponsive or disrespectful, and transportation availability. Groups less likely to use well-child care include single parents, low income, younger parents, families who change residence frequently, minority groups, and low-education level.^{2-4,11,13}

Some public and private insurance policies affect the availability of preventive care. States with higher reimbursement rates for preventive care have higher rates of well-child care visits than states with lower reimbursement rates.¹⁴ Medicaid patients are less likely to use preventive care. Physicians in private practice are increasingly unwilling to accept new Medicaid patients because of low reimbursements. As a result, Medicaid patients are forced to seek care in hospital or community-based clinics, or use emergency departments or urgent care centers.¹⁵

In addition, well-child care compliance is low because of the high number of visits required, particularly for children less than 5 years old. The well-child care visit schedule endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends a total of 28 visits between birth and 18 years including 14 visits in the first 5 years.¹⁰



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The AAP recommends well-child care visits to the doctor according to the schedule. Regular visits to the doctor build the partnership between parent and doctor that is important to make the most of well-child care visits.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Encourage parents to take their child to well-child care visits as indicated by a schedule from their primary care physician.
- Talk to parents about the benefits of establishing a relationship with a doctor during times their child is well. Benefits include:
 - ◇ Opportunities for parents to ask questions about health, growth, nutrition, and behavior.
 - ◇ Screenings such as vision, hearing, and developmental
 - ◇ Making sure immunizations are up to date.
 - ◇ Establishing a relationship with a doctor when the child is well so that the child's needs are better met in case of illness.

RESOURCES

Pediatric Screening and Prevention Guideline

www.wellmark.com/

ConnectCare:

www.seeyourdoc.org

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*Quick Reference***WELL-CHILD CARE
01-B3****Parent Messages**

- Well-child care visits provide preventive medical care for children.

Parent Skills

- Describes the purpose of well-child care (i.e. vaccines, screenings and measurements to assess developmental progress, parenting and health guidance).
- Takes child to well-child care visits according to schedule.

*Parent Tip***WELL-CHILD CARE**

Parents,

Well-child care is about regularly scheduled check-ups at the doctor's office for children ages birth through 18 years. Well-child care prevents illness and ensures that your child is growing and developing normally.

At a well-child visit, the doctor may:

- Do a physical exam.
- Measure your child's growth.
- Check your child's vision and hearing.
- Give immunization shots.
- Answer your questions about safety, nutrition, child development, behavior, and parenting.

Don't wait until your child is sick to go to the doctor. Well-child care helps keep your child healthy. Take your child to well-child care visits on time. The schedule tells you what ages your child should see the doctor. Get a schedule of when to take your child to well-child visits at the doctor's office.

CUIDADO ADECUADO DEL NIÑO

Padres,

Un cuidado adecuado del niño significa programar los chequeos regulares en la oficina del medico para niños desde el nacimiento hasta los 18 años de edad. Un cuidado adecuado del niño les ayuda a estar seguros que su hijo esta creciendo y desarrollándose normalmente. Este también ayuda a prevenir enfermedades. En una visita para el cuidado adecuado del niño el medico puede:

- Hacer un examen físico.
- Medir el crecimiento de su hijo.
- Chequear la visión y la audición de su hijo.
- Administrarle las vacunas.
- Responderle sus preguntas acerca de la seguridad, la nutrición, el desarrollo del niño, el comportamiento y como levantar a su hijo.

No espere a que su niño este enfermo para ir al medico. Un cuidado adecuado de su niño ayuda a mantener a su niño sano. Lleve a su hijo a los chequeos adecuados para el cuidado del niño a su debido tiempo. La programación le muestra a usted, a que edades su hijo debería ver al medico. Obtenga esta programación cuando usted lleve a su hijo a una cita donde el medico, para el cuidado adecuado de su hijo.

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