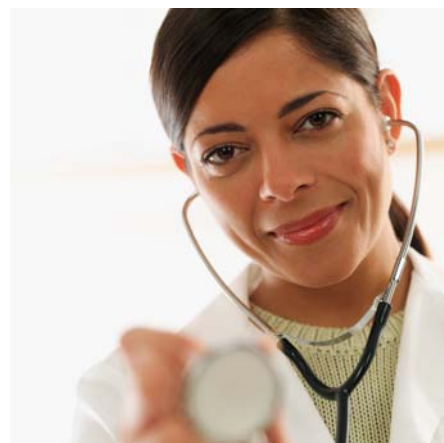


## ***Head Start, Parents, and Doctors: A Partnership for Healthy Children*** **The Well Child Visit**

### **Why go to the doctor when my child is well?**

Well Child Visits help the doctor to get to know your child when he/she is not sick and to evaluate his/her overall health, development, and behavior. This is a chance for your doctor to recognize concerns about your child before they become more serious and to give you guidance about how to keep your child healthy and growing. At some visits, the doctor will do laboratory tests and give immunizations (shots). Doctors recommend that Well Child Visits begin before your child is born and continue until your child is 21 years old. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following schedule of Well Child Visits for children from birth to 5 years old:

- Prenatal (a visit during the pregnancy to meet the baby's doctor and discuss the baby's care)
- Newborn
- Within 3-5 days after hospital discharge
- By 1 month
- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- 9 months
- 12 months
- 15 months
- 18 months
- 24 months
- 30 months
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years



### **What should I bring to the Well Child Visit?**

- Your or your child's health insurance/Medicaid card.
- A list of the immunizations (shots) that your child has already received.
- Your list of questions and concerns, arranged from first to last in order of the greatest importance, for the doctor to answer at the visit.
- A list of all of the medicine that your child takes; make sure your list includes prescriptions, over-the-counter medicine, traditional medicine, herbal remedies, vitamins, etc. If it is easier for you, bring the bottles or containers that the medicine is sold or kept in.
- One of your child's favorite books or toys; this will help your child feel comfortable while you are waiting for the doctor. It is best to bring a toy that you can wash when you get home, in case there are contagious diseases in the waiting room.

### **How can I help prepare my child for the Well Child Visit?**

- Try make-believe doctor visits at home. You and your child can take turns being the doctor and the child. Place a piece of notebook paper on the floor next to a wall and practice "standing on the scale." Have your child take off their shirt and pants, shoes and socks, and put on a pretend "examination gown" (an adult's shirt put on backwards). Practice sitting still while the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth are examined (say "AHH"). Practice sitting still while the doctor listens to the heart and take deep breaths in and out while the doctor listens to the lungs. Practice not giggling when the doctor "squeezes your belly."
- Be ready in case the doctor wants to examine your child with the child sitting on your lap. If you know from experience that this works best for your child, tell the doctor before the child is placed on the examination table. Do not wear belts with a sharp buckle that might scratch your child and be careful with long necklaces and earrings that might get pulled accidentally if your child becomes upset.

- Be comfortable with the idea that your job is to support and comfort your child during the visit, not to discipline or punish your child if they become upset during the exam. It is the doctor's job to recognize that the child is becoming upset and to try to make the child more comfortable with what is being done. In some situations (for example, looking into the ears or the mouth), the doctor may ask you to hold your child in a certain way to protect your child from injury. It is the doctor's responsibility to decide whether or not the child is too upset to do part of the exam safely and to try again later. If you are uncomfortable with anything that is being done, or if you are worried about your child being upset, tell the doctor.
- End the visit on a positive note. Find something *real* that your child did (or didn't do) that you can praise them for ("Even though I know you didn't want to, you let the doctor look in your mouth" or, "I know you didn't want to get a needle, but you stopped crying the second it was over") and give them that praise.

**Besides talking with you about your child and doing a physical examination, as part of the Well Child Visit, the doctor or staff will:**

- **Give** any needed immunizations (shots).
- **Check** your child's vision and hearing at each visit.
- **Do** blood tests at 12 and 24 months to check for anemia or lead poisoning. (Your doctor can give you information about what tests and shots are recommended at what age.)
- **Give** you information on health, wellness, normal development, and behavior.
- **Fill** in or give you forms or papers you will need (such as a list of shots, test results, hearing/vision test results, results of physical examination).
- **Answer** your questions.

**Why does my child need so many shots?**

Many life-threatening childhood illnesses are no longer common in the U.S. because most people have been immunized to prevent them from catching these diseases. This is not true for some other parts of the world. In some areas both children and adults, who have not had their shots, get these diseases and sometimes die from them. People have different opinions and concerns about immunizations and possible risks connected with them. Talk about any questions or concerns you have with your child's doctor.

**What if my doctor says things that I don't understand?** This happens to all of us; even when we as adults go to the doctor. If the doctor says something you do not understand, make sure to ask him/her to explain.

**What if they don't tell me what a test means or its results?** Don't be shy, ASK! For example, if you are told that your child "has a hematocrit of 30" and you wonder 'what is a hematocrit' or 'what is normal,' make sure to ask the doctor to explain and get the information you need to keep your child healthy.

**Anything else?** Once the visit is over and your questions have been answered, SET UP YOUR CHILD'S NEXT APPOINTMENT. Also remember, Head Start staff members can help you make sure your child is up-to-date on the Well Child Care schedule. Feel free to ask your Head Start family service worker or health coordinator any questions you have about your child's doctor's visits.