



The National Healthy Childhood Programme

Newsletter 7: Christmas 2019



The best Christmas gift: You are your child's favourite toy - your time is the most precious Christmas gift you can give

While it's easy to get caught up in the stress of buying the perfect present for children, we all know that very often they end up playing with the box it came in! The truth is that we don't have to spend a fortune on gifts for children.



From the second they are born, your child is ready to form a relationship with you. Babies love looking at your face and getting to know you. Your child loves to play, chat and have fun with you. This early relationship strengthens their bond with you and is very important for the development of their social, intellectual, language and problem-solving skills.

As Christmas can be a wonderful chance for families to spend time together, the team at mychild.ie is sharing some tips about how to play with your child this Christmas - whatever age and stage they are at.

1. Tummy time

Tummy time is really important for your baby for the first six months as it helps build their upper body strength. Start with short sessions of about 30 seconds a few times a day, while they are awake, and slowly increase the time. At first, babies can do tummy time on your lap while you wind them after a feed. Another way to do tummy time with a newborn is to lie them on your chest. As they get bigger, tummy time on the floor will encourage your baby to move and experiment with rolling and crawling.

At six months, floor based play is very important for learning how to move, sit up and crawl. It can be a good idea to get on the floor with them to guide and move them to a seated position.

Always place your baby on their back if they fall asleep during tummy time, to reduce the risk of cot death.

2. Cuddling, singing and soft toys

Cuddling your baby and singing songs and nursery rhymes to them can help to stimulate their senses and awaken their curiosity. Rubbing soft toys on their cheeks and hands is another way to help them experience new sensations. All these things help your baby to learn and develop. As they get bigger, singing and dancing to educational songs are great ways to play with your child.

3. Peekaboo and clap handies

Babies love to play simple games, like peekaboo and clap handies. They watch what you are doing and mimic your actions. Playing these simple games with your baby helps their development as they need muscle control, fine motor skills and hand-eye co-ordination to do the actions. The games also encourage your baby's communication and concentration.

4. Bath time

Bath time is a lovely opportunity for play. Water feels very natural to babies after being in fluid for nine months in the womb so they will be happy splashing and kicking around.

As they get bigger, children enjoy the sensory experience of pouring water from different containers. These don't have to be shop bought items – there are lots of things around the house that will work! Some good examples are plastic jugs, buckets, empty water bottles, whisks, sieves and even empty yogurt pots.

Make sure you never leave a child alone in the bath or around water- not even for a moment.

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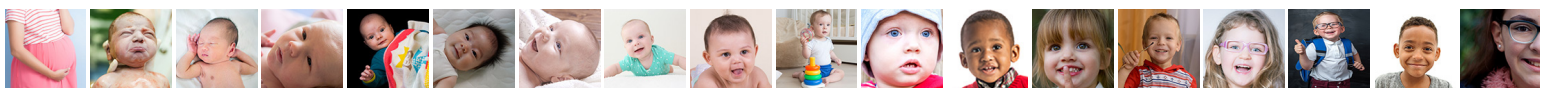
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5. *Building blocks*

By six months, babies might enjoy banging blocks together or putting blocks into a cup. As they get bigger, they might start to stack up the blocks and knock them down again. Toddlers might become budding builders of towers and skyscrapers! If you don't have blocks, try stacking plastic cups or containers.



6. *Reading books*

Reading is wonderful for helping to support language development. It is never too young to start. Snuggle up with your baby and share a picture book. Allow your baby to hold the book. Notice what your baby is interested in and talk about that, for example, "You see the monkey!" Make funny faces and animal sounds and have fun with your child. At this stage, that's more important than reading the words in the book.



As they get older, toddlers enjoy books with simple stories or about their favourite characters. Encourage them to join in for repetitive lines of the story. It is best to follow your toddler's interest in the book – this may involve describing the pictures instead of reading the story. It may also mean reading the same book over and over! This is perfectly fine - they will move onto a new story when they are ready.

Join your local library with your child. It is free and they can borrow as many as 12 books at a time! Your local librarian has a wealth of knowledge and suggestions which they will be happy to share.



7. *Playing ball*

It's a good idea to include a ball or two in your child's gifts. Not only will they benefit from the physical activity, ball games are also very good for the development of your child's balance and coordination. From one year, you can gently roll a soft ball to your baby and encourage them to roll it back to you. As they get bigger, they might be able to chase the ball and kick it to you.

8. *Jigsaws and card games*

For toddlers and older children, jigsaws and card games, such as Snap, are a great way to wind down before bedtime and also help to develop your child's problem solving skills. They can find out for themselves where the jigsaw piece fits or what cards match each other. You can help them if they need it. These games also allow you to interact and talk with your child and to support their growing speech and language development.

9. *Arts and crafts*

Most toddlers and older children love to get messy and creative with paint, colourful crayons and paper. Let them loose with a paintbrush or help them use a stencil pattern so they can draw and discover different shapes and how to create them. Finger paints are great too, allowing your child to feel the textures of the paint on the page. Just make sure that your child is supervised during these fun activities. Check that all paint and crayons are non-toxic and, along with any other equipment used, are suitable for your child's age and developmental stage.



10. *Role playing and family board games*

Children love to pretend and to use their imagination. There are lots of costumes in shops (make sure they carry the CE safety mark) or your child might be just as happy to dress up in an old t-shirt or yours and a funny hat. Encourage them to use their communication and language skills by explaining what they are doing and what they 'see' around them.

For older kids, it is a good idea to invest in a board game or two to play together and limit screen time, which can be hard particularly during the colder months. These games can be fun for the whole family.



For your child's safety ensure that all toys and play things are in good condition and are suitable for their age and developmental stage.

Your time is the most important thing you can give to your child - every moment matters. So have fun, sing songs, play games, dance, be silly - your child will love it!



National Screening Advisory Committee

One of the recommendations from the 'Scoping inquiry into the CervicalCheck Screening Programme' (Scallly report, September 2018) was the setting up of a National Screening Committee to advise the Department of Health and the Minister on all new proposals for population based screening and revisions to current programmes. The National Screening Committee is to be an independent Expert Advisory Committee and will evaluate against internationally accepted criteria. A similar committee is in place in the UK since 1996.



In July 2019, Professor Niall O'Higgins was announced as the Chair of the National Screening Committee. Professor O'Higgins was involved in the establishment of breast cancer services, including BreastCheck, and was Chair of the expert group on colorectal cancer screening that led to the development of BowelScreen.

Later in July 2019, the Department of Health issued a call for expressions of interest for members of the National Screening Committee from across a wide range of areas such as public health, ethics, health economics, epidemiology, medico-legal, social science, general practice, paediatrics, obstetrics, cancer, genetics, laboratory services, nursing and midwifery, journalism, diagnostic imaging, pathology, psychology and importantly two members for the public/patient voice.

In October 2019, the membership of the now called National Screening Advisory Committee was announced with 19 members in total. The role of the National Screening Advisory Committee will be to:

- effectively implement an agreed methodology for accepting applications to consider new or revisions to existing population screening programmes
- agree and implement a prioritisation process for the consideration of new or revised population screening programmes
- develop and implement a robust and transparent system to evaluate potential population-based screening programmes against a set of internally recognised criteria
- clearly communicate the recommendations and the reasoning to the Department of Health, stakeholders and the public on the outcomes of deliberations

The Minister for Health has asked the Chair to prioritise a review of the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme and specifically how to progress with expansion to screen for other conditions in line with international best practice.

The National Screening Advisory Committee began its work with its [inaugural meeting on 18th November 2019](#).

Introducing the new Clinical Liaison Officer at the Newborn Bloodspot Screening Laboratory

Catherine Harvey has recently taken up post as the Clinical Liaison Officer in the Newborn Bloodspot Screening Laboratory in Children's Health Ireland (CHI) at Temple Street.

The primary aim of this role is to provide a link between the laboratory and the maternity units/hospitals in all aspects of patient follow-up in the Newborn Screening Laboratory.

A key part of Catherine's work is with the cases of screen positive results. These are babies identified through screening as being at high risk of having one of the screened conditions. Catherine telephones the designated liaison nurse in the maternity unit/hospital where the baby was born and provides the details of the baby and the suspected condition. The designated liaison nurse will contact the family. They then arrange for the baby to attend Temple Street, the local maternity unit or Cystic Fibrosis Centre (in the case of CF suspected results) for any required investigations or treatment.

The National Newborn Screening Laboratory can be contacted by:

- phoning 01 878 4277 / 4610
- emailing info.newbornscreening@cuh.ie



Child safety alert: cords or chains on blinds and curtains

Cords or chains, particularly the ones that form loops, on blinds and curtains are a strangulation risk for children. Children under the age of 3 years are especially at risk. In recent years 7 children, under 3 years of age, died after becoming entangled in loose cords and chains from curtains or blinds.

Because many parents and carers are unaware of the risks, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC), in partnership with mychild.ie, launched a safety campaign to raise awareness of the dangers and some key steps to take to help reduce the risk. You can watch the campaign's video on YouTube - <https://youtu.be/eMM-i00JSe4>.



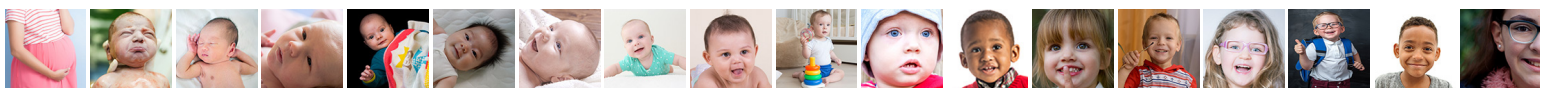
The HSE Child Safety Programme advises:

1. Do not fit blinds and curtains with cords or chains attached.
2. Check every blind and curtain (on windows and doors) in your home for cords or chains:
 - Be particularly mindful of your child's bedroom, play room and any other room they spend time in.
 - Look for hidden cords and chains. If your child pulls on one, it could easily form a loop that could get caught around their neck. This could cause strangulation or even death.
 - Check the front, side, inside and back of your blinds and curtains for chains or cords.
3. If you have blinds or curtains with cords or chains:
 - replace the cords or chains with wands positioned out of reach of your child (to prevent eye injuries), **or**
 - completely replace the curtain or blind with a cordless or chainless option - check with shop staff that what you are buying meets current safety standards. Check that written instructions for assembly, installation, use and maintenance are provided, and follow them if you are installing the blind yourself.
4. If it's not possible to use a wand or to replace the curtain or blind, then you must fit a safety device. These include cord and chain tidies, tensioning devices, chain break connectors, tie down devices, cleats and breakaway devices. Make sure the safety device:
 - has a current safety standard
 - is fitted and used correctly, according to manufacturers instructions
 - is checked regularly to make sure it is in good working order and good condition and that it is properly securing the cord or chain
5. If you buy a blind or curtain with attached cord or chain, check that it includes a safety device for keeping them out of the reach of children. Check that the device and the blind or curtain meets current safety standards. The device should be fitted at the same time as the blind or curtain. Follow manufacturers instructions for its installation and use. Read all warnings.
6. Keep cords and chains out of your child's reach:
 - Keep anything your child can climb on, such as a sofa, chair, table, toy box, bookcase or similar furniture, away from windows. Even a cord or chain that is secured high off the ground could be within your child's reach if they have climbed onto something. This advice also applies to doors that have corded or chained blinds or curtains.
 - Do not place a cot, bed, high chair or playpen within your child's reach of any window (or of doors that have corded or chained blinds or curtains).
7. Check blinds and curtains in other places your child spends time, for example a grandparent or childminder's home.
8. It is safest to have window blinds and curtains that are free from cords or chains. Using safety devices and taking precautions can help reduce the risk of a child being strangled - but it does not get rid of risk.
9. Watch your child at all times as children do not understand danger.
10. Visit ccpc.ie and mychild.ie for more information.

This information is intended as a guide. Contact your supplier with any specific queries regarding the safety of your blinds or curtains.

Share this advice with everyone who looks after your child.





National Breastfeeding Week - a great success

National Breastfeeding Week was celebrated and promoted by mychild.ie from 1 – 7 October.

The Chairperson of the National Breastfeeding Implementation Group, Carmel Brennan, said

‘This year’s campaign is one of our most successful. We received huge support from consultants, midwives and public health nurses to help promote our message of the importance of skin-to-skin contact for all babies.’

The week was also supported by a social media plan across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram (with a potential reach of 1.3 million) promoting the benefits of breastfeeding for mother and child.

Well done to Laura McHugh, National Breastfeeding Co-ordinator. Thank you to HSE Communications Team for their support.

Touching scene: why skin-to-skin care is best for newborns . . . and parents

Direct skin-to-skin contact has been shown to have many benefits including bonding, stabilising of the baby’s temperature and heart rate and lowering of stress

© Mon, Sep 23, 2019, 06:01

From the Irish Times 24/9/2019

Sheila Wayman



Virgin Media 1-Elaine Show



Mother Sínead Ward and baby Riona Roche in the Neonatal ICU at the Coombe Hospital. Photograph: Nick Bradshaw for The Irish Times



‘Latching-On’ morning in Áras an Uachtaráin 4th/10/2019



Event in Marino marking National Breastfeeding Week



Welcome to our team

Meena Purushothaman has recently taken up the role of Assistant National Breastfeeding Co-ordinator.

Meena brings a wealth of clinical experience to her new role and we look forward to working with her.

Automatic formula preparation machines - a formula for illness?

Automatic formula preparation machines are popular with parents. The Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the HSE do not recommend the use of these machines as there is insufficient evidence regarding their efficacy and safety.

What’s the problem?

While we can see the appeal of this system in terms of convenience, we have concerns. There is no evidence that automatic formula preparation machines are effective or safe. There is some evidence suggesting that the ‘hot shot’ often used by these machines is insufficient to fully eradicate all bacteria present in powdered infant formula.

Two unconnected cases of VTEC in infants were notified to Departments of Public Health in October 2019. In both cases the caregivers were reconstituting powdered infant formula with well water using an automatic formula preparation machine.

20% of households in Ireland get their drinking water from private supplies. Although automatic formula preparation machines may use an antibacterial filter; there is no evidence in the public domain as to the efficacy of this when the water entering the filter has a higher antimicrobial load. This could be the case with private well water, if the well is not adequately protected, maintained and treated.

Raising awareness among parents and carers of the potential dangers - help us to spread the message

We have included advice on automatic formula preparation machines in all of the information resources developed for parents. We have also, together with HSE Communications, used the mychild.ie social media platforms to release a general statement about the safety and efficacy of formula preparation machines.

“Breastmilk is important for your baby’s healthy growth and development. If you decide to give your baby formula feeds, we don’t recommend using automatic machines for preparing powdered formula. There is no evidence that these machines are safe.”

This simple statement achieved considerable interaction via Facebook, with over 31,000 impressions and was shared 130 times by users.

Please advise parents of the possible risks associated with these machines. Advice on safely preparing formula feeds is available on mychild.ie



Healthy Weight for Children (0-6 years) Framework - stakeholder event

On the 28th November Dr Sinead Murphy, Consultant Paediatrician, Children's Health Ireland (CHI) at Temple Street, formally launched the [Healthy Weight for Children \(0-6 years\) Framework](#).

The framework was developed by a multi-disciplinary working group with input from HSE, *saferood* and TUSLA. It provides strategic direction for a national and sustainable approach to facilitating healthy weight and the prevention of obesity in children aged 0-6 years in Ireland.

The launch took place at a stakeholder event which was held to raise awareness about the framework and recent policy and practice developments that support its implementation.

Participants were informed about current actions, across a range of sectors, underway to implement the framework. Opportunities were also provided for participants' expertise and experience to inform the development of an implementation plan for the health service specific elements of the Framework.



L:R: Eileen Maguire, Dr. Fionnuala Cooney, Caroline Peppard, Sarah O'Brien, Eilish Whelan, Celine Croarkin, Dr. Kathleen O'Sullivan.



New HSELand nutrition modules - *A healthy start for toddlers* and *Healthy weight for children*

At the event, Dr Sinead Murphy also launched two e-learning modules - *Healthy start for toddlers* and *Healthy weight for children*.

These have been developed to guide and support parents on toddler nutrition and to enhance the skills of HSE staff in supporting parents whose children are overweight or obese.

To access the online training module follow these steps:

1. Log onto HSELand.ie
2. Click on 'Course Catalogues'
3. Select the 'National Healthy Childhood Training Programme' icon
4. Select the 'Nutrition' icon. Both units are listed as course 06 and 07

Each training module should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. There is a brief assessment (5-10 minutes) at the end to achieve certification. All child health e-learning modules have received accreditation.



Happy Christmas from the Editorial Team

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