



The National Healthy Childhood Programme

Newsletter 8: Christmas 2020



Welcome to our 8th newsletter! It is safe to say that 2020 has been a strange year and has brought with it challenges, both professional and personal, for many. Although the child health team has been busy with

Covid-19 and many of the plans for the year had to be adapted, we are proud of all that has been achieved. Never has the strength of teamwork been so evident or so important. We thank each person who has contributed to the work and acknowledge, again, the dedication and commitment shown by all those working in child health and throughout the HSE.

This year has seen the retirement of one of our dedicated child health and public health leaders, Dr Phil Jennings. Phil was the public health lead for the National Healthy Childhood Programme and Director of Public Health for the Midlands. Since 2014 Phil has brought her passion for, and commitment to, our children's health and wellbeing into every aspect of her work as child health lead.

We miss her greatly and look forward to marking her retirement when we can meet safely again. In the meantime we wish her good health and every happiness for the future.

Finally, happy Christmas to all! While celebrations may be different this year, we hope they are nonetheless enjoyable and we look forward to a safe and happy 2021.

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Excellence Award recognition for The Nurture Programme: Infant Health and Wellbeing

The Nurture Programme earned the *Improving Our Children's Health Award* at the HSE Health Service Excellence Awards this year. The programme is a partnership between the HSE, the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Katharine Howard Foundation, and the Centre for Effective Services.

The judges at the Excellence Awards noted that the programme used evidence-based practice that engages all the relevant stakeholders 'in order to make things better' for the community. The Nurture Programme outputs include antenatal education standards and information, online and print resources for parents and professionals, a standardised national record, and a blended-learning training programme.

That application of current evidence-based best practice to child health across a number of channels and platforms, and the extensive engagement with parents and professionals to ensure consistency of message and promote positive health behaviours were unique features of programme.

Two of its key achievements have been the website, mychild.ie, which has had over 3.1 million page views since 2019 and more than one million users, and the child health information books. Over 154,000 of the books were distributed to parents throughout 2019. There are three books in total - *My Pregnancy*; *My Child: 0 to 2 years*; and *My Child: 2 to 5 years*.

The website and books provide invaluable and practical information on pregnancy, labour and birth, everyday care for babies and toddlers, as well as parenting advice, supports and entitlements. The topics for inclusion were informed by the completion of 16 focus groups and online surveys. Over 4000 parents responded to surveys. Staff consultation and user testing involved over 500 staff working in child health services.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the development of the mychild.ie resources.





Expansion of mychild.ie as part of new Sláintecare child health project

More articles will be added to mychild.ie and a new week by week pregnancy journey are to be created as part of a Sláintecare child health project.

100 new guides will be added across a wide range of topics from pregnancy, labour and birth, and babies and young children. These will be published in batches over the coming months. Suggestions for topics not currently available on mychild.ie are welcome. Please contact sorcha.nicmhathuna@hse.ie

Work is also underway on a new pregnancy support journey. The first phase of the project will mean pregnant women can sign up for weekly emails which will be tailored to the subscriber's due date. The emails begin in early pregnancy and will include the first 3 months of a baby's life.

Each email will contain information and tips relevant to that week, including appointments, vaccines and symptom information, and signpost to relevant articles on mychild.ie. The emails will also signpost to a new maternity services directory, which is also being created as part of the wider Sláintecare project. Another project underway will see trial closed groups on social media providing breastfeeding support.

This project has received funding from the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019.

Sláintecare.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



mychild.ie facts and figures

2,319,101 visits to the website from January to September this year



3,000,000

MyChild pages on HSE.ie appeared in **3 million** search results with an average position of 5 on Google and a click through rate 7.2% (Q3 - July to September)

36% of Google search activity was between 7am to 1pm with peak times from midnight to 1am accounting for 8% alone (Q3 - July to September)

44% of parents aged 25 to 45 say they have heard of mychild.ie, an increase of 3% since February

10,500

mychild.ie followers on Instagram

Top search terms used resulting in organic traffic were cradle cap, chickenpox, ectopic pregnancy and gestational diabetes (Q3 - July to September)

Follow us on

▶ facebook.com/HSEmychild.ie ▶ Instagram: [hse_mychild](https://www.instagram.com/hse_mychild) #hsemychild ▶ Twitter: [@HSELive](https://twitter.com/HSELive) #hsemychild

According to an online survey of more than 1,000 parents across Ireland conducted on behalf of mychild.ie at the end of October, the most informative sources of information about child health are



- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1. GP/doctor | 7. HSE.ie / mychild.ie |
| 2. Public health nurse | 8. Internet – other specific websites |
| 3. Friends/family | 9. Other child health books |
| 4. Pharmacist/pharmacy staff | 10. Booklets/leaflets at doctors/hospital, etc |
| 5. HSE My Child books | 11. Information in hospitals |
| 6. Child health information websites | 12. Social media |

Thank you to everyone for promoting the MyChild resources!



New Healthy Eating Guidelines for 1 to 4 year olds

The Department of Health has launched new *Healthy Eating Guidelines for 1 to 4 year olds*. These guidelines were developed as a collaboration led by the Department of Health and supported by the HSE, the Irish Nutrition & Dietetic Institute (INDI), Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and *safe*food. They are based on a recent scientific report from the FSAI “Scientific evidence for food based dietary guidelines for 1-5 year olds” which is available at fsai.ie. Further information is available from www.mychild.ie/nutrition



A suite of new resources, including a 24-page booklet, posters of the new children’s food pyramid, tip sheets, fact sheets and meal plans, are available gov.ie/en/publication/da7f19-eat-well/#healthy-eating-guidelines-for-kids

The new guidelines provide support and guidance to parents and guardians in relation to child-sized portions, suitable healthy foods and snacks, happy healthy mealtimes and lots of practical suggestions to ensure children are offered healthy meals and snacks for their growth and development.

The 9 main messages for parents from the guidelines:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Healthy eating habits can last a lifetime | 6. Offer water and milk as drinks and avoid sugary drinks |
| 2. Small tummies need small servings | 7. Have regular times for meals and snacks |
| 3. Portion size matters | 8. More vitamin D is needed in winter months* |
| 4. Milk is a key food | 9. Make sure your child gets enough iron through the food they eat* |
| 5. Limit foods high in fat, sugar and salt | |

**see articles below for further information on updated recommendations*

Resources

www.mychild.ie/nutrition has new articles on the following:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| • Food portion sizes for children aged 1 to 4 years | • Drinks for children aged 1 to 4 years |
| • Snacks for children aged 1 to 4 years | • Vitamin D supplements for children aged 1 to 4 years |

The *My Child: 0 to 2 years* and *My Child: 2 to 5 years* books will be updated before the next print run.

*Updates to vitamin D recommendations

From birth to 1 year of age

In February this year a change in EU legislation governing the composition of infant formula milk was announced. The new legislation resulted in the reformulation of infant formula products on the Irish market. The Department of Health now recommends that:



- Babies, from birth to 1 year of age, who are being breastfed, should continue to be given a daily supplement containing 5 micrograms (μg) of vitamin D. This should be provided by a supplement containing vitamin D exclusively.
- Babies, from birth to 1 year of age, fed infant formula, should **not** be given a daily vitamin D supplement if they are having more than 300ml (about 10 fluid ounces) of infant formula a day. This is because infant formula is fortified with vitamin D and other nutrients.

From 1 to 4 years of age

The new *Healthy Eating Guidelines for 1 to 4 year olds* advise that, in order to improve the overall vitamin D intake status of this population group, a low-dose vitamin D-only supplement (5 μg) is recommended for all 1– 4 year olds from Halloween to St Patrick’s Day (i.e. during the extended winter months).



*Iron supplementation - changes in recommendations

The FSAI scientific report cited above highlights the need for an additional 4 mg of iron/day for 1 to 3 year-olds growing at ≤ 25 th growth percentile level. Dietary intake of iron is unlikely to be sufficient for smaller 1 to 3 year-old children (growing at ≤ 25 th percentile level). Any child who is small for age and identified as < 25 th centile should have a nutritional assessment of their dietary iron intake carried out as per current local practices. Referral to a community dietitian is recommended for any child with low iron status. Additional iron can be provided through the use of iron-fortified full-fat milks or formulae (containing at least 1 mg of iron/100 ml. Alternatively, a low-dose iron supplement providing the RDA for iron (7 mg) can be given 4 days a week.



Shorter sleep duration and overweight and obesity at 5 years old in Irish children

Sleep is one important factor in maintaining healthy weight, which interacts with other important factors like diet, exercise and screen time.

The current scientific literature suggests that short sleep duration probably increases the risk of childhood overweight and obesity through a number of inter-related mechanisms, including effects on glucose homeostasis, dietary quality and sedentary behaviour.

Analysis of data from the *Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) National Longitudinal Study of Children* has shown an association between shorter sleep duration and overweight and obesity at 5 years old.¹

- Shorter sleep duration increased the likelihood of overweight and obesity (OR 1.33, 95% CI 1.16-1.52).
- Shorter sleep duration was also associated with other obesogenic behaviours, like excessive daily screen time of 3 hours or more (OR 1.83, 95% CI = 1.30-2.59).

These findings support the *safefood* START campaign, which advises parents on establishing healthy routines.

For sleep, aim for the following:

About 6 months old	10-11 hours at night plus 3 daytime naps (1.5 - 2 hours for 2 of the naps)
About 9 months old	10-12 hours at night plus 2 daytime naps (1.5 - 2 hours)
About 1 year	10-12 hours at night plus 2 daytime naps (1 - 2 hours)
About 2 years	10-12 hours at night plus 1 daytime nap (1.5 - 2 hours)
3 - 5 year olds	11 - 12 hours at night, plus a daytime rest of up to 1 hour
5 -12 year olds	10+ hours
Over 12 year olds and teenagers	8 - 9 hours

¹ This research was undertaken by Dr Laura Heavey, Specialist Registrar in Public Health Medicine IMC 403104



START making the most of family time

For many families spending more time together has been a positive experience arising from the Covid-19 restrictions. Understandably though parents and guardians may be finding it difficult to manage screen-time, “treat” consumption and physical activity at home.

The START campaign from the HSE, *safefood* and Healthy Ireland is encouraging parents to use this increased family time as an opportunity to begin a new healthy habit and start their children on the way to a healthier life. The START campaign is about supporting parents to introduce small changes into family life that can make a big difference.

It encourages parents to look at seven actions that can help maintain a healthy weight for their children:

1. Eat fewer treat foods
2. Drink water and milk as regular drinks
3. Give the right portion size for children
4. Eat more fruit or vegetables
5. Be more physically active
6. Limit screen-time
7. Increase sleep-time

Some useful START resources for parents can be found at [makeastart.ie](https://www.makeastart.ie). These include recipes, games ideas, and advice and guidance from HSE psychologists, Peadar Maxwell and Conor Owens. A range of free printed resources, including a booklet for parents and a menu-planner are available on [hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/heal/healpublications/start-campaign-materials/](https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/heal/healpublications/start-campaign-materials/).



Big wins **START** with small changes



The National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme

In August the Minister of Health approved the recommendation from the National Screening Advisory Committee to add Adenosine Deaminase Deficiency Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (ADA-SCID) to the current eight conditions screened for as part of the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme.



ADA-SCID is a subtype of SCID and is the leading cause of SCID in Ireland. It is most prevalent amongst the Irish Traveller population. SCID is an inherited disorder of the human immune system i.e. a primary immunodeficiency. With the introduction of screening for ADA-SCID these babies will be identified earlier, commenced on treatment earlier and outcomes will be improved.

The addition of any new condition is a complex process requiring clinical, laboratory, technical, public health and project management expertise. The HSE has started the planning process to achieve screening for ADA-SCID in the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme.

Demand for HSE's mychild.ie breastfeeding experts increases by 57% due to COVID-19

The HSE's online breastfeeding support service (Ask our Expert) is available seven days a week with the live chat service available Monday to Friday from 10am to 3pm. .

We have seen a significant rise in online queries as COVID-19 restrictions impact face-to-face breastfeeding support. The figures compare queries made to the mychild.ie breastfeeding support service between April and August against the same period in 2019.

The most popular queries received by the service during this time included: how to prepare for breastfeeding while pregnant, how to restart breastfeeding after a break and issues around pain and breastfeeding.

Other supports have been developed during the pandemic, with a number of hospital antenatal breastfeeding classes and some breastfeeding groups run by the HSE and voluntary organisations moving online. There are approximately 60 virtual breastfeeding support group meetings taking place each month. Phone and virtual breastfeeding support is also being made available to replace face-to-face appointments as services try to re-establish safely, while face-to-face one-to-ones are being provided where needed.

For more information on local breastfeeding support groups and volunteers in every county. go to www2.hse.ie/services/breastfeeding-support-search/



Public health nurse and lactation consultant Roisin Sullivan set up an online breastfeeding group in response to COVID-19 restrictions to provide advice and support to mothers in Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin.

HSE Breastfeeding Action Plan - breastfeeding breaks for public health service staff

The transition of returning to work and continuing to breastfeed can be a challenging time. Staff in the public health service will be able to avail of breastfeeding breaks following their return to work after maternity leave in early 2021.

Health sector employers are supporting mothers to continue breastfeeding until their child's second birthday with the introduction of the *Breastfeeding Policy for Staff Working in the Public Health Service*. This is a welcome development because of the importance of breast milk for babies' healthy growth and development. Breastfeeding is also important to the mother's health in providing protection against ovarian and breast cancers.

The Policy applies to all employees in the HSE and Section 38 hospitals and agencies who are breastfeeding and/ providing breast milk for up to 2 years from the date of birth of their child. The new maximum age limit goes beyond the current statutory entitlement of 6 months and is a significant measure in supporting health service employees to breastfeed following their return to work from maternity leave. The provisions of the Policy are designed to promote a workplace culture that facilitates employees who are breastfeeding whilst recognising service demands and resource constraints. Detail information will be available and communicated in January 2021.



The HSE National Standards for Antenatal Education in Ireland were launched on Monday 2 March 2020

Antenatal education aims to equip pregnant women and their partners with the knowledge and skills to negotiate their journey through pregnancy and to prepare them for childbirth and parenthood. National consultation with pregnant women and their partners highlighted the variation in structure, content and provision of antenatal education in Ireland. In response to this and in line with the scope of the Nurture Programme 'from conception through to the child's 3rd birthday', the Standards were developed through the Nurture Programme – Infant Health and Wellbeing and complement earlier antenatal to postnatal developments including the My Pregnancy book and pregnancy content on mychild.ie. The National Standards for Antenatal Education aim to enhance the current provision of antenatal education services in Ireland.



Ms Margaret Quigley, National lead for Midwifery, ONMSD; Ms Cathy O'Sullivan, Interim Director Centre of Midwifery Education, CUMH; Ms Angela Dunne, Director of Midwifery, NWIHP; Professor Mary Nolan, Professor Perinatal Education, University of Worcester; Dr Caroline Mason-Mohan, Consultant in Public Health Medicine

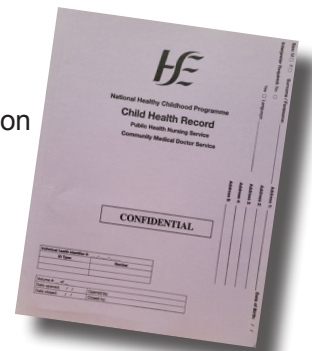
Almost 60,000 babies were born in Ireland in 2019. Strengthening the supports available to every baby and their families from the earliest stage will help to give them the best possible start in life. Supporting early childhood is important as this is the point at which the child is developing most rapidly, and a healthy childhood has been shown to reduce health inequalities later in life.

The keynote speaker at the launch was Professor Mary Nolan, Professor of Perinatal Education at the University of Worcester, who delivered an inspiring presentation on the evidence, value and importance of antenatal education, in addition to challenges in effective provision. The launch was attended by practitioners and stakeholders and mark an exciting milestone in this area. Despite initial delays due to Covid 19, the implementation of the standards through the National Women and Infants Health Programme in 2021 will be a significant step towards improving the health and wellbeing of pregnant women, infants, and families. The Nurture Programme will continue to collaborate with NWIHP on implementation of the standards with a particular focus on capacity building for antenatal education nationally.

Click here to read the [National Standards for Antenatal Education in Ireland](#)

National Standardised Child Health Record

We are delighted to report progress on implementation of the new *National Standardised Child Health Record for Public Health Nursing and Community Medical Doctor Services*. The introduction of this new standardised record supports a nationally standardised approach in practice and documentation of the five core child health developmental checks from the Primary Visit (72 hours) to the child's preschool check (46-48 months). Implementation of the new record has commenced in almost all CHOs with outstanding areas on target for implementation early 2021.



Blended learning programme

To support the implementation of the new record, Child Health Record Workshops were delivered to nominated PHN leads from all CHO areas in early 2020. Due to delays associated with Covid 19, further refresher sessions were delivered online for each CHO in Autumn 2020. To support full implementation of the clinical content of the National Healthy Childhood Programme, a one day Clinical Skills Review Training curriculum had been developed by the Training and Resources Team of The Nurture programme. The face to face content of the original one day programme was further revised in line with Covid 19 restrictions and made available to all PHNs delivering child health services in Ireland. The course is a blended learning training programme and has been granted 3 CEUs by NMBI.

Course facilitators are Dr. Helen Mulcahy (College Lecturer and Coordinator BSc Nursing Studies, UCC), Denise Gillespie (ANP Child Health and Parenting, Donegal), Sinead Lawlor (National Practice Development Co-ordinator-Public Health Nursing Service), Jane Dare (Interim / Director of Public Health Nursing, Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow), Grace O'Neill (Regional Child Health Training / Development Officer / Immunisation Coordinator, South-East), Brenda Mellet (Child Health Programme Development Officer, Mid-West), Mari O'Donovan (Child Health Training & Development Officer Cork, Kerry), Mary Devane (Practice Development Co-ordinator/ADPHN, Meath), Connie O'Connell (Assistant Director Public Health Nursing, Galway).

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This blended learning programme aims to provide public health nurses with the knowledge, skills and confidence to implement the core National Healthy Childhood Programme. It builds on the learning in the 4 child developmental e-Learning units and focuses on the updated content areas including UDT, head circumference, neonatal jaundice, primitive reflexes, DDH, motivational interviewing techniques and key components of the 9-11 month Child Health Assessment check. The session contains a mixture of theory, discussion, practical demonstrations and role plays.

Training has been provided in all CHOs and to date the training has been attended by almost 1700 PHNs nationally. Additional sessions will be scheduled as required in the New Year. Evaluations to date have been very positive.

Child Developmental Assessment Manual for RPHNs

In addition to the training a supporting resource *The Child Developmental Assessment Manual for RPHNs* has been developed and provided to all PHNs delivering child health services. This manual outlines the content of the five core child developmental checks and complements the new record.

We would like to thank you all for your support in the development and implementation of these resources and look forward to working with you all to further improve the service for child health in Ireland.

If you have any queries in relation to this training please contact: nurture.programme@hse.ie

Toy safety

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) has urged consumers to be safety aware when they are buying gifts, particularly toys, this Christmas. This follows the seizure and destruction of over 51,000 unsafe or non-compliant children's toys by the CCPC. The CCPC has created a checklist of what to look out for to help ensure you are safety aware this Christmas:

1. Look for the CE (Conformité Européene) mark. This is the manufacturer's declaration that the toy complies with safety regulations and safety standards in the EU. Look for the CE mark on the toy, instructions or packaging.



Example of age labelling.

A genuine CE mark has the E started on the circular profile drawn out by the C character:



A fake CE mark has less space between the C and the E:



2. Always buy from reputable retailers. This will help you to avoid unsafe, non-compliant toys, or toys with a fake CE mark. The CCPC advises that if you are buying online, it can be hard to know who you are buying from, so it's important to do some quick research, check reviews and social media pages. Check where the business is based. If you can't find this information easily, approach with caution. If the business is based outside of the EU, you may consider finding an alternative EU store to ensure you have stronger rights should an issue arise in the future. Carefully check toys purchased online and toys bought second-hand.
3. Check for detachable parts. One of the biggest dangers for children is small or detachable parts of toys, as they can lodge in their ears, nose or throat, and cause an injury, or be a choking hazard to small children.
4. Check the age range. Age labelling is the manufacturer's way of telling you whether the toys are safe for a child of a particular age. It is also important to consider any younger children who may be in the household and who might be in danger if they play with the toy also.
5. Check for sharp edges, long cords or cables and be sure to avoid dangerous, fold-away parts or small holes that could trap children's fingers.

Visit ccpc.ie and follow them on Twitter @CCPCIreland for more information and tips on how to be #CCPCSafetyAware this Christmas.

Check out mychild.ie for lots of child safety advice and tips.



'Twas the night before Christmas.....
A seasonal poem from our poet in residence,
Dr Fiona McGuire

*'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house
 Not a person was coughing, not even the spouse
 The masks were all washed and were drying with care
 The windows were all open to circulate air.*

*The hands were all cleaned to keep Granny protected
 And even Elf's little shelf had been cleaned and disinfected
 Santa was chortling happily as he flew through the skies
 Pausing in each household to hand sanitise
 When he saw the open windows he laughed at his luck
 As being medically vulnerable he didn't want to get stuck.*



*And the parents were exhausted, asleep in their room,
 Dreaming of presents and gatherings on Zoom,
 With fewer table settings and less knocks on the door,
 2020 brought a Christmas never seen before.*

*And the children stirred slightly, when up on the roof
 They heard bells softly chiming, and the thud of a hoof
 And even Covid-19 could not steal their delight,
 Or the magic of a very different Christmas Eve night.*



**Wishing you and yours a safe and happy Christmas,
 from the Editorial Team:**

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Carmel Brennan | Programme Manager, The National Healthy Childhood Programme |
| Brenda McCormack | Project Support, The Nurture Programme |
| Paul Marsden | Project Manager - Child Health Screening Programmes |
| Dr Fiona McGuire | Senior Medical Officer, Public Health - Midlands |
| Laura McHugh | National Breastfeeding Co-ordinator |
| Sorcha NicMhathuna | Communications Manager, The Nurture Programme |
| Anne Pardy | Programme Manager, The Nurture Programme |
| Laura Smith | Business and Information Manager, Public Health - Midlands |

Remember ...

**face coverings and physical distancing
 help to prevent the spread of Covid-19**

The National Healthy Childhood Programme
 ☎ 057 93 59757 ✉ healthy.childhood@hse.ie

The Nurture Programme - Infant Health and Wellbeing
 ☎ 057 93 59909 ✉ nurture.programme@hse.ie

The National Healthy Childhood Programme Office, Department of Public Health, HSE - Area Office,
 Arden Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly, R35 TY28.

