Giving all children a healthy start in life

From:

The Rt Hon David Laws MP
Dr Daniel Poulter MP

Department of Health

25 March 2013

Improving children’s health and increasing the chances of children growing up as happy, healthy young people is a priority for this Government. In the Department of Health, we are working across a range of areas to help protect children from preventable illness and to encourage healthy behaviours from an early age.

To help schools, we’re providing advice to those who need it on improving the experiences of children with special educational needs and on how to encourage healthy eating and exercise. We are providing free school meals for children in reception, year 1 and year 2 of infant school from September 2014. This will give young, first-time mothers a family nurse, who can help them with their child’s health and wellbeing.

Between 2010 and 2015, we are doubling the number of children getting a family nurse. By supporting vulnerable mothers, we can: increase the support and information available to families; improve the health visiting service; improve the early years foundation stage; and encourage healthy behaviours from pregnancy. We are improving maternity care by: giving women a single, named midwife who will oversee the care of both mother and baby; making sure that every woman has one-to-one midwife time; making sure that women who have postnatal depression get the help they need; and making sure that women who have had a miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of a baby get more support from the NHS.

We want to do more to help children who grow up in the poorest areas of the country. We are providing free school meals to children in years 3 to 6 of primary school. We are also providing free school meals to children in nurseries in a pilot to see whether this is a good policy to adopt more widely. The pilot will be extended to all nurseries in 2014-15.

Providing free school meals to children in reception, year 1 and year 2 of infant school from September 2014 gives young, first-time mothers a family nurse, who can help them with their child’s health and wellbeing. Providing free school meals to children in years 3 to 6 of primary school and to children in nurseries in a pilot helps children from poor families to stay healthier throughout their lives.}

Supporting vulnerable mothers and children through immunisation

Immunisation is the most important way of protecting children from serious diseases. Children get protection in early childhood, which then lasts for a decade, so we launched a temporary immunisation programme to make sure babies were protected.

However, there is evidence of a reduction in vaccination coverage in the last year or two in the UK. To improve the health visiting service, we’re providing advice to children who need it on the consequences of not getting vaccines. We’re giving parents and people expecting a baby information and advice through regular emails, text messages and short videos on the Start4Life website.

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Improving the early years foundation stage

One of our national priorities is to bring forward a generation of healthy, literate and skilled young people. We are investing in early childhood care and learning.

Between April and July 2013, we are running a nationwide survey of nursery practitioners. It will help us understand what children get out of nursery education and how we can make quality and consistency better.

Health visitors are trained nurses or midwives with detailed knowledge of child health and development. They visit families and help parents provide the best care for their child, from pregnancy to early childhood.

Improving the health visiting service

The Start4Life website provides information and advice about health and wellbeing for families. It helps parents to support their child’s development, including: selecting toys and games; reading with their child; and helping their child to enjoy eating healthy food. It also provides information about diseases and the benefits and side effects of immunisation.

Encouraging healthy living from an early age

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