

## Early Childhood Health

Every parent wants a healthy child. Not every parent is that fortunate. The challenges faced by low birth weight and preterm infants and their families can last for many years. Compared to their healthier counterparts, these infants are much more likely to experience developmental delays, require special education services, exhibit behavioral difficulties, and develop serious chronic diseases. In addition to health and behavioral risks for children born at low birth weight, there are costs to society in the form of increased medical and educational needs, and decreased lifetime job achievement. The United States spends approximately \$26 billion dollars annually on low birth weight and pre-term infants.

Fortunately, recent advances in preventive care make it possible to greatly reduce the numbers of children who are born with significant health problems.

### Prevention through Perinatal Care

- Prenatal care starting in the first trimester
  - Adequate prenatal care increases early identification and timely treatment of treatment of high-risk conditions. This includes addressing behavioral factors, such as smoking and drinking alcohol, that contribute to poor birth outcomes.
- Health insurance:
  - Prevents long term negative health affects through timely diagnosis and treatment
- Adequate nutrition
  - Promotes healthy brain and physical development needed for cognitive and motor development

### Raising Healthy Children

Arriving at school *ready to learn* is a key indicator of a child's future success in school and life. Physically healthy children are significantly more likely to arrive *ready to learn*. For this reason, the Colorado School Readiness program, along with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment are emphasizing indicators associated with prevention of illness, along with early identification and treatment of health conditions.

### Healthy Child Indicators

- Well child care
  - Periodic developmental screenings accompanied by physical exams provides an opportunity for anticipatory guidance to parents and early detection of growth and developmental problems. Early interventions can be planned to minimize long term negative impacts on learning.
- Immunizations:
  - Guards against preventable diseases that can cause long-term disabilities
- Early and periodic screenings for hearing, vision, and developmental benchmarks
  - Ensures children receive appropriate and timely services that can reduce the long term effects of developmental delays and the need for special education services
  - Early, periodic, screening, diagnosis, and treatment (EPSDT) screenings are comprehensive check-ups consistent with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines. They are recommended at 2-4 days after birth, by 1month, at 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, and 18 months, and yearly for ages two through twenty.
- Environmental screenings for toxins such as lead

- Exposure to lead, frequently through paint in older homes, may cause irreversible neurological damage as well as renal disease, cardiovascular effects, and reproductive toxicity.
- It is recommended that children receive blood lead toxicity tests at ages 12 and 24 months and at anytime through age 6 if not previously tested.
- Safety from injury
- Safety from abuse and neglect
- Dental care
- Establishing healthy habits early
  - Eating a healthy balanced diet
  - Eating at least three meals together weekly as a family
  - Regular exercise
  - Establish healthy sleep habits

### **Evidence Based Practices**

Studies conducted over many years have begun to identify the programs and practices that are most likely to achieve positive health outcomes for infants and children. Thus, communities now have the opportunity to access and implement programs with a proven track record to address their unique health circumstances. Some of these practices are:

- Comprehensive services that address multiple health issues and family needs
- Collaboration between parents, diverse community stakeholders and service providers
- Two- generation formats that simultaneously work with children and with their parents
- Community awareness and parent education on health issues and developmental milestones
- Home visitor programs that provide consistent proven services, such as the Nurse Family Partnership Program
- Child Health Care Consultation for child care providers and others serving young children
- Medical home or regular place of care
- Health education for early care and education professionals
- Interventions with first time parents