

Publication withdrawn

This guidance is out of date and was withdrawn in August 2025.

HEALTH VISITOR FACTSHEET

Introduction

The start of life is a crucial time for children and their parents. Evidence (including from neuroscience and social science) shows early support in childhood is crucial to a child's future development:

"We have found overwhelming evidence that children's life chances are most heavily predicated on their development in the first five years of life. It is family background, parental education, good parenting and the opportunities for learning and development in those crucial years that together matter more to children than money, in determining whether their potential is realised in adult life."
Frank Field, *Independent Report on Poverty and Life Chances* (December 2010)

Health visitors lead and deliver the Healthy Child Programme (HCP), providing services covering pregnancy and the first five years of life. The HCP is the evidence-based public health programme for children and young people, which provides a range of health interventions and support beginning in pregnancy and continuing through early childhood. Health visitors can play a crucial role in ensuring that families get good, joined up support at the start of life. A health visitor can, for example, provide clinical intervention to a depressed mother struggling with a new baby; or identify a child's speech or language problem that would benefit from early help. These are just two examples of many areas where health visitors can provide support and information to help parents to access available services.

The new vision for the health visiting service includes:

- a commitment to create a bigger, rejuvenated workforce with an extra 4,200 health visitors by 2015
- quality improvements in the health visiting service and
- improved health outcomes for children and families.

Good, well-resourced health visitor services work best in partnership with GPs, maternity and other health services, Sure Start Children's Centres and other early years services to ensure that families have a positive start. The Government's vision for the future of health visiting in England will put in place a new health visiting service that all families can expect to access, as part of a range of local services to support families.

While health visitors deliver services for children from pregnancy through to five years of age, school nurses provide services for children aged 5 to 19 years.

The health visitor service: what it can offer children and parents

Under the new health visitor model, health visiting teams offer four levels of service to families with children under five:

Your community offers a range of services, including some Sure Start Children's Centre services and the services families and communities provide for themselves. Health visitors work to develop these and make sure local families know about them

Universal services from the health visitor team working with general practice to ensure that families can access the Healthy Child Programme, and that parents are supported at key times and have access to a range of community services

Universal plus offers rapid response from the local health visiting team when specific expert help is needed for example with postnatal depression, a sleepless baby, weaning or answering any concerns about parenting

Universal partnership plus provides ongoing support from the health visiting team and a range of local services to deal with more complex issues over a period of time. These include services from Sure Start Children's Centres, other community services including charities and, where appropriate, the Family Nurse Partnership

The service will be available in convenient local settings, including Sure Start Children's Centres, and health centres, as well as through home visits.

Health visiting: how it improves the health of our communities

By implementing the Healthy Child Programme, health visitors enable a number of health outcomes including:

- Promote healthy lifestyles and work with communities to build and use the strengths within those communities to improve health and well being and reduce inequalities
- Achieve population (or 'herd') immunity through the increased uptake of immunisations
- Increased access to evidence-based interventions through the Healthy Child Programme to children and families and tailored to specific need
- Increased breastfeeding, appropriate infant nutrition and lifestyle changes to tackle rising obesity and related illness in later life
- Improved maternal mental health and wellbeing enabling strong early attachment and infant emotional wellbeing
- Improved school readiness
- Reduced number of children requiring formal safeguarding arrangements – achieved through early identification and intervention