



Public Health  
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

# Healthmatters Giving every child the best start in life





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## 1. Why the early years are so crucial

What happens in pregnancy and early childhood impacts on physical and emotional health through into adulthood.

Supporting good maternal health is important for safe delivery and good birth weight to give babies the best start.

The prevention of adverse health factors in pregnancy is vital. Premature and small babies are more likely to have poorer outcomes.

A failure to act early comes at great cost, not only to individuals but to society as a whole. The cost of treating perinatal mental health alone costs £8.1 billion each year.





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## 2. Achieving a healthy pregnancy

Health before and during pregnancy is vital. Pre-conceptual care includes giving advice on:

- full immunisation status
- vitamins and folic acid
- reducing alcohol consumption
- giving up smoking
- family planning and contraception services between pregnancies

The Healthy Child Programme is the heart of public health services for children and families. It brings together the evidence on delivering good health, wellbeing and resilience for every child.

It sets out the schedule for services covering care from 28 weeks of pregnancy through to age 5.

The best outcomes for both mother and baby happen when mothers are:

not socio-economically disadvantaged



managing stress or anxiety



not smoking, consuming alcohol or misusing illegal substances



in a supportive relationship – and not experiencing domestic violence



enjoying a well-balanced diet



not in poor physical, mental or emotional health





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## 3. Staying healthy in pregnancy

A healthy woman is more likely to give birth to a healthy baby. Health professionals should support women, and their partners, to adopt positive health behaviours and reduce risk factors.

During pregnancy, women should be advised to eat a healthy diet and to be physically active. Being active and fit during pregnancy can help women to cope with labour and get back into shape after the birth.

There are a number of risk factors in pregnancy including:

- smoking
- drinking alcohol
- perinatal mental health
- being in an unsupportive relationship

## Smoking in pregnancy

Smoking during pregnancy causes up to **2,200** premature births, **5,000** miscarriages and **300** perinatal deaths every year in the UK



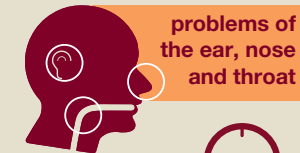
It also increases the risk of complications in pregnancy and of the child developing a number of conditions later on in life such as:

premature birth



low birth weight

respiratory conditions



problems of the ear, nose and throat

obesity



diabetes



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## 4. Supporting the early years

Communicating with babies is the foundation of attachment. A secure attachment ensures a child will feel secure, understood and helps to lay down the best foundations for life.

Preventing and intervening early to address attachment issues will have an impact on resilience and physical, mental and socioeconomic outcomes in later life.

Creating the right environment to promote and support breastfeeding is crucial. The benefits of vaccination should also be promoted to parents.

## Promoting breastfeeding

**The Department of Health recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months**

Breastfed babies have lower rates of:

- gastroenteritis
- respiratory infections
- sudden infant death syndrome
- obesity
- allergies

The UK has some of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world

Rates of any breastfeeding until 6 months:

UK 34%

US 49%

Germany 50%

Switzerland 62%

Senegal 99%



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## 5. Ready to learn at 2

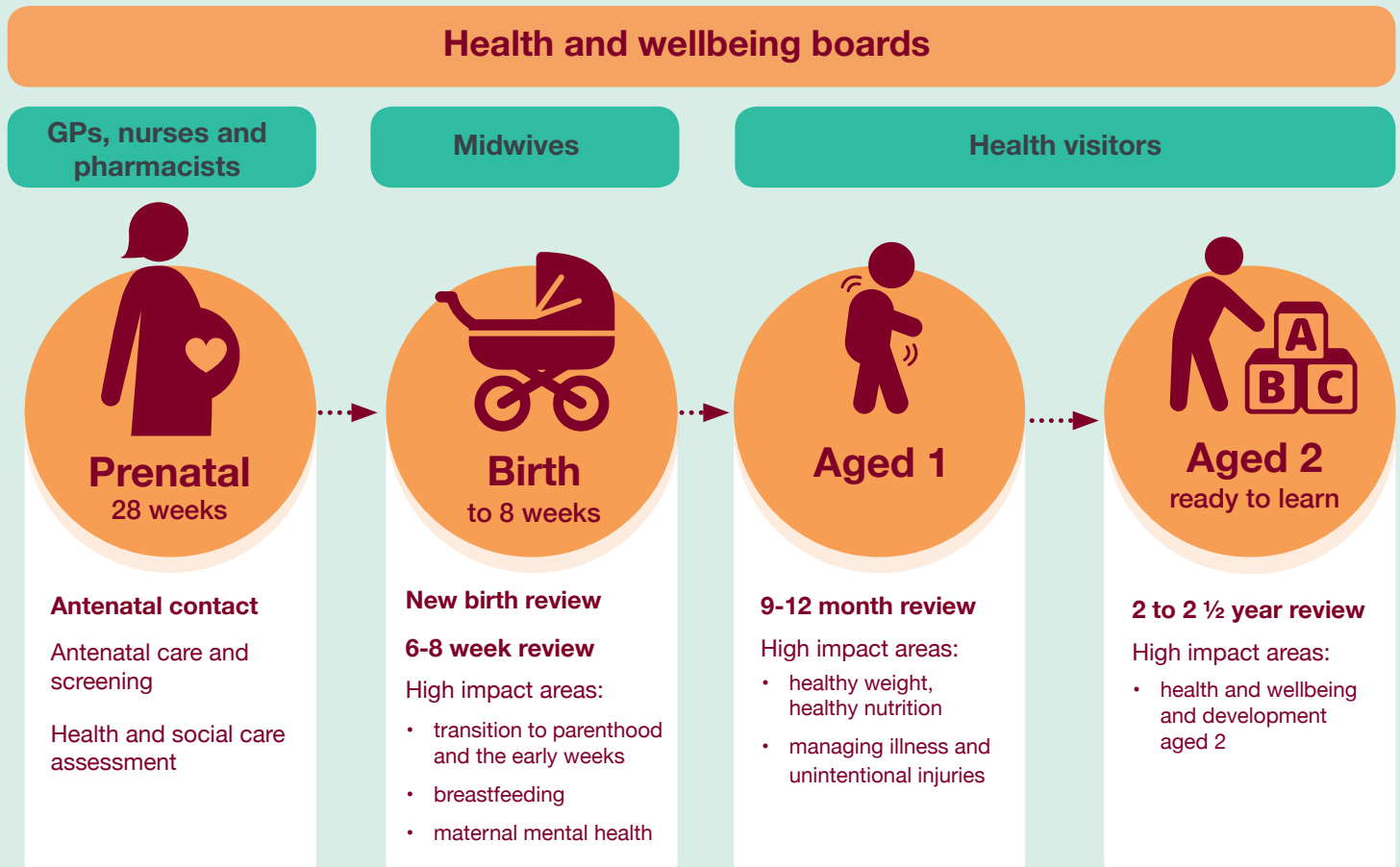
Everyone involved in public services needs to think family and children and young people at every interaction.

Health and wellbeing boards are uniquely positioned to take a holistic view of the needs of children and to build settings and services around them to ensure that they are able to reach their potential.

The six early years high impact areas can help inform local authorities around the commissioning of the health visiting service and integrated children's early years services.

The universal two year review provides an opportunity to identify children who are not developing as expected and require additional early intervention.

## The Healthy Child Programme: Pregnancy to age 2



Mandated reviews