

A Newsletter for First Steps Families ♦ Winter 2010

Handy Tips for Staying Healthy During the Winter Months

Once the weather begins to turn cold and people tend to stay indoors, there is an increased chance your child will be exposed to germs and viruses. This is especially true of First Steps families with small children (who often like to put everything in their mouth). First Steps families have at least one provider coming into their homes regularly for visits, increasing the potential for the transmission of colds and the flu.

Here are some tips to help families stay healthy during the winter season:



- 1) **Cancel appointments if you or your child is sick.** If you or your child has cold or flulike symptoms, it is important to cancel your regularly scheduled provider appointments to prevent the spread of the illness. Many First Steps providers work with children whose immune systems are already compromised, and it is important to limit exposure to as few people as possible. (You would want other families to do the same for you.)
- 2) **Find out the provider's policy on cancelling appointments when the provider is sick.** Talk with your provider(s) about First Steps guidelines for cancelling appointments when the provider is ill. You wouldn't want to risk exposure to your child and neither does the provider.
- 3) **Everyone must wash their hands.** Washing your hands frequently helps protect you from the flu and other viruses. Germs might be living on surfaces such as counters; touching them with your hands could be the direct path toward becoming ill. At a minimum, make sure that you and your child wash your hands frequently (along with everyone else who comes into your home).
- 4) **Wash your toys.** It is always a good practice to wash any toy that your child mouths or drops to the floor, and this is especially true during cold and flu season. Plastic toys can be washed in a solution of bleach and water; go to http://www.clorox.com/cleaner_home/kids_room/ for more information. Be sure to read the tags on your surface-washable-only toys, or contact the manufacturer for instructions on how to clean and sanitize these toys.
- 5) **Stay in.** Staying home when either you or your child has cold or flulike symptoms is important. Not only are you contagious, but you have a weakened immune system and could catch other germs. To limit their exposure to viruses, avoid taking infants and small children to public places (grocery stores, malls, schools, etc.) as much as possible.

(For additional information, please visit <http://www.flu.gov/>.)



A Missouri Family's Story

By Michelle L. of Chesterfield, Mo.

I am the parent of twin boys who have autism and are now 9 years old. Keeping them healthy when they were younger was always a challenge. When the cold and flu season hit, I knew that we would be housebound with viruses and colds for most of the winter. I look back fondly at our years in First Steps and the wonderful occupational therapist who taught my boys how to put on a shirt, how to handle a toothbrush, how to use a spoon and (best of all) how to wash their hands.

Both boys hated keeping their hands under the water to do a good job of cleaning them. The occupational therapist came up with a fun game for them to sing their favorite song each time they needed to wash their hands. That simple trick worked – it became a game for them to see who could sing faster and get done first.

Another handy trick our provider taught me was to regularly rotate out toys so that I was always disinfecting them. I created color-coded bins that I used to separate the toys. When I saw one of the boys put a toy in his mouth, it would go in the red bin when he was done with it. All toys in the red bin were cleaned at the end of the day.

Such simple tricks, but so effective. Now that my boys are “big boys” and I have a new baby daughter, I'll definitely be using these same tricks with her!

Just for Fun

READING, TALKING AND WRITING

Babies benefit from experiences that create interest in reading, talking and writing. These should be activities that your child finds fun and interesting, but don't overdo it! A few highly interesting activities are better than too many not-so-interesting things to do.

- Published and homemade picture books, ABC books, talking books, photo-album books, and the like are all great bets for building a baby's interest in stories.
- Read to your baby any time he or she seems interested. Find favorite books and let your child touch, point, show and babble as you share them together.
- Play lap games and fingerplays together. Sing nursery rhymes and made-up songs.
- Talk to your child while you are changing diapers or cooking meals. Include your child when you talk with other people. Ask simple questions like, “What do you think about that?” It isn't important that your child understands what is being said. The important thing is making your child part of the activity.
- Let your child try finger drawing with pudding, yogurt and paint. Involve your child in activities like watching you make a shopping list or writing a note or letter.
- Encourage your child to play with alphabet toys that make sounds when shaken or dropped.

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(click on First Steps)

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