

Managing children's special health needs in child care

Using a child care service when your child has special health needs can be daunting. There are a range of health issues that children can experience, including asthma, allergies, food intolerances and illnesses such as epilepsy, cystic fibrosis and diabetes that require specific care practices. It is important that child care services work with you and your family to support your child to be safely and respectfully included in the child care environment.

How can you support the service?

Providing clear and accurate information to your child's service is essential to ensure your child is kept healthy and safe in child care. The following points will help you to work effectively with the service to support your child's health care:

- Explain your child's health needs when you enrol them. Services will have a space on the enrolment form to include any specific health requirements. If you feel you need to discuss your child's needs in more detail, it may be worthwhile arranging a meeting with someone at the child care service, such as the coordinator, director and/or a health professional who will work directly with your child. It's important to be up front with any specific health requirements that your child has. Being honest with the service will help ensure your child's safety and wellbeing right from the start.
- If there are any health professionals working with your child, such as a paediatrician, physiotherapist or occupational therapist, give their contact details to the child care service. The staff at the service may coordinate with other professionals working with your child to help develop consistent care strategies. The health care professionals may be able to tailor information specifically for the service's setting.
- Provide the service with an individualised health plan for your child such as an asthma management plan or anaphylaxis action plan. Ensure you provide the service with updated plans as soon as they become available.

- It may be beneficial to demonstrate to staff at the service how to administer medications such as Ventolin® (or other medicated inhalants), insulin or an EpiPen® (adrenalin) for your child. There are regulations that services must abide by to help support your child's health needs. It is a requirement that:
 - for centre-based services like preschools and long day care, there must be a staff member on duty with a current approved first aid certificate, anaphylaxis management training and emergency asthma management training. One staff member can hold all three qualifications or there can be a number of staff with the different qualifications.
 - in family day care, each family day care staff member and assistant must hold all three qualifications.
- If English is your second language, consider taking a friend or family member with you to help communicate your child's needs to the service. If you do not have a friend or family member for support, you could also contact an interpreter service to help.

It's important that you do not feel intimidated or unsure about sharing information about your child's health requirements with the service as they need this to help keep your child safe. The information you provide about your child is kept confidential and will only be shared with the staff who need it to support your child's health, safety and wellbeing.



How can the service support you?

Services have a duty of care for each child and must make sure they protect their health and safety at all times. This means they have a responsibility to support your child in every way to ensure they receive a high standard of care. Some of the ways that your child's service can do this include:

- Ensuring that the staff who work with your child are informed about the individual health needs of your child
- Undertaking specific training that may be needed to help care for your child. This may include asthma management, managing anaphylaxis or emergency response training for conditions such as epilepsy or diabetes
- Developing clear procedures for managing children's allergies. All child care services will have a policy to follow when dealing with children's medical conditions. The service could talk with you about their policy and the procedures they have in place. The service could seek your feedback to help them improve their practices
- Using open communication to inform you about your child's care and experiences at the service and seeking your advice about your child's health needs. Communication methods can include daily conversations, checklists detailing the food your child has eaten or a daily diary to share information between yourself, your child care service and, if relevant, other professionals working with your child.

Services may also have access to updated information about your child's type of health needs. If you have trouble finding information you can ask your service for any help they can provide.

While your service should aim to meet the needs of all of the children in their care, some negotiation and compromise may be required to ensure that the strategies support and protect your child while being practical for the child care setting. If your child has specific allergies, the service will work in partnership with you and other families using the service to ensure that your child is not exposed to the allergen.

While every reasonable attempt will be made, it may not be possible to make sure the allergen is entirely eliminated, for instance, if families provide children's food. The service will need to develop clear procedures and guidelines for staff to prevent your child being exposed to the foods they are allergic to.

To be sure your child's needs are met, keep an open and honest relationship with your child care service, including the particular staff who work with your child.

