



Your Child's Health and Development

Birth to 6 years

Each child is unique. Growth and developmental stages are sequential, variable and individual. The stages occur in the same order in all children but there are differences in how long the stages last and in the characteristics of an individual child within each stage.

	BIRTH - 2 WEEKS	6 - 8 WEEKS	4 MONTHS	6 - 8 MONTHS	12 MONTHS	18 MONTHS	2 YEARS	3 - 4 YEARS	5 - 6 YEARS
Immunisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immunisation begins at birth. Your hospital or doctor will provide further information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The second recommended immunisation is due at 2 months. Further information is available from your health professional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The third recommended immunisation is due at 4 months. Further information is available from your health professional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The next recommended immunisation is due at 6 months. Further information is available from your health professional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The next recommended immunisation is due at 12 months. Further information is available from your health professional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The next recommended immunisation is due at 18 months. Further information is available from your health professional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check immunisation status. Ensure that you follow up any missed immunisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The next immunisation is due at 4 years. Further information is available from your health professional. Check that all previous immunisations have been completed to this age. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Victoria, you must present a School Immunisation Certificate detailing your child's immunisation status when enrolling your child at primary school. Check your <i>Child Health Record</i> for further details.
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure your baby's room is well ventilated, cot rails and slats are no more than 8.5 cm apart, mattress is firm and a neat fit. Avoid use of pillows and bumpers in the cot. Remove ties and ribbons from clothes and toys. Lie your baby on their back to sleep. Hold your baby when bottle feeding. Don't leave your baby unattended other than in a cot or bassinet. Check that the baby's car restraint is secure and correctly installed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Always check bath water temperature before bathing your baby. Put cold water in first. Ensure all toys are non-toxic and have no sharp edges or small detachable parts which may cause choking. Replace any damaged car restraints after an accident. Never leave your baby unattended in a car. Ensure your baby is attended if not in a bassinet or cot as there is a risk of falls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in mobility can increase risk of falls or accidents. Block off dangerous areas in the home, such as laundry or stairs. Keep hot things and areas out of baby's reach. Avoid using overhanging tablecloths. Ensure your baby is not exposed to hazards such as leaded paint dust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider transferring your baby to a forward facing car restraint once they are 8-9 kg in weight. Store any poisons or dangerous substances in a secure place. Be aware of potential dangers to your baby in the home that may cause falls, burns or drowning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage your child to sit while eating and drinking. Supervise feeding and avoid raw chunks of carrot and nuts that may cause choking. Teach your child to go down steps backwards. Prevent accidental burns by reducing hot water temperature in hot water system to 50°C. Be alert to climbing and install locks or childproof latches on cupboards. Store cleaning products and medications securely. Check toys for sharp edges or choking hazards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check water safety around the home keeping child's mobility in mind. Lock or guard high windows to prevent child falling out. Keep sharp utensils, matches and lighters out of reach. Guard against accidents and burns when cooking. Provide sunscreen, shade and clothing for sun protection. Provide age appropriate play equipment and supervise play with other children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imitates others but is unaware of any dangers. Ensure that all play equipment and toys are safe. Secure all areas of your home and garden against potential dangers or hazards. Fence pools and store poisons securely. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A child safety seat is required for car travel until your child weighs 18 kg. Continue to supervise outdoor activities particularly near roads, water and in crowds. Remember to check that play equipment and surrounds are safe. Provide adequate protection from the sun. Encourage your child to sit when eating or drinking to prevent choking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss bicycle, pedestrian and road safety with your child. Make sure your child wears an approved bicycle helmet when riding. Warn against going with strangers. When your child reaches 18 kg, use a car booster seat with a back and sash guide.
Health Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember to take your <i>Child Health Record</i> to all health visits. Your maternal and child health nurse checks your baby's growth and development. Dress your baby appropriate to the weather. Talk to your maternal and child health nurse about baby skincare, bathing, settling and local services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check-up of general health and developmental dysplasia of the hips (DDH). Assessment of risk factors for hearing and developmental dysplasia of the hips (DDH). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check-up of general health and development. Discuss concerns or questions with your maternal and child health nurse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check-up of general health and development. Hearing assessed between 7-9 months. Avoid giving your baby sweeteners on dummies, sweet drinks in bottles or allowing continuous sucking of breast or bottle-this can lead to tooth decay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss any behavioural concerns with your maternal and child health nurse. Use a clean face cloth wrapped around your finger or a small toothbrush and water to clean your child's teeth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check up of general health and development. Discuss any development or behaviour concerns with your maternal and child health nurse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss toddler behaviour and toilet training with your maternal and child health nurse. Use a child strength fluoride toothpaste (pea-sized amount) once they are able to spit it out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check-up for general health and development. Supervise teeth brushing and begin to floss your child's teeth. Increased contact with other children may lead to minor illnesses, for example, colds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School nurses visit primary schools in Victoria. You can talk to them about your child's health. Encourage your child in personal and dental hygiene.
Nutrition and Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breastfeeding patterns are being established. If you are not breastfeeding, use formula that is appropriate for newborns and make up the formula exactly to instructions. Average weight: 3.2kg. Average length: 53cm. Average head circumference 35cm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gradual changes occur in feeding and sleeping patterns; frequency of feeds usually reduces. Avoid using sweeteners on dummies. Average weight gain: 700 g per month. Average head circumference increase: 2.5 cm per month. Posterior fontanelle closes over by now. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breastmilk or formula is the main source of nutrition. Frequency of feeds continues to reduce; night feeds may reduce to one. Introduce solid foods between four to six months. Discuss with your maternal and child health nurse. Avoid sugar and salt in foods and drinks. Avoid fruit juices, cordials or syrups. Average weight gain: 700 g per month. Average length gain: 2 cm per month. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce a variety of foods with varying textures and flavours. Breast or formula feeding reduces as solids increase. Allow your baby a chance to feed themselves but continue to supervise. Offer water to drink between meals. Introduce a cup from 6 months. Usually has 2-4 teeth, lower central incisors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eats most of the food the family eats (3-4 meals a day). Appetite decreasing. Uses fingers to eat and can hold a spoon but is not ready to self-feed. Can drink cows milk. Encourage drinking from a cup. Wean completely from the bottle. Average weight: 9-10 kg. Average length: 75 cm. Has 6-8 teeth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drinks from a cup and uses a spoon to eat. Encourage water as the preferred drink. Avoid fruit juice and cordials. Average weight gain: 200 g per month. Average length gain: 1 cm per month. Anterior fontanelle is usually closed by now. Has 6-12 teeth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to offer a variety of healthy family foods. Becoming more independent about choice of food and self-feeding. Growth rate slows down and appetite can decrease. May become fussy about food. Average weight: 12-13 kg. Average length: 87 cm. Has up to 20 teeth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeds self completely using spoon and fork but needs help with cutting up food. Average weight: 16 kg (increase of 2-3 kg per year). Average length: 98 cm (increase of 7-9 cm per year). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time of rapid growth and development. Offer a varied and nutritious diet from all the food groups. Prepare healthy snacks for after school that won't spoil their appetite for dinner.
Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holds hand in a fist; grasps a finger when placed in their hand. Lifts head and turns to the side when lying on stomach. Shows limited or no head control when pulled to sit up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follows an object by moving eyes and head. Raises head to a 45 degree angle when lying on stomach. Starts to move fist to mouth. Hits at objects with hands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moves more deliberately as reflex movement decreases. Lifts head and chest by supporting weight on arms when lying on stomach. Increase in neck and head control. May roll from stomach on to back. Clasps hands together and takes them to mouth. Attempts to pick up object using both hands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progresses from sitting supported by arms to sitting alone. Pulls to standing position and takes steps with alternate feet when held. Moves by creeping, rolling or attempting to crawl. Claps hands. Transfers objects hand to hand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pulls to stand, walks forward and sideways holding a hand. May stand alone or walk alone. Uses thumb and forefinger to pick up small objects. Points with index finger. Builds a tower of two blocks and bangs two blocks together. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walks well with feet slightly apart. Climbs, manages corners and obstacles well. Holds or grasps a pencil and scribbles using preferred hand. Builds a tower of 3-5 blocks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walks up stairs and may walk backwards. Squats and stands without using hands. Kicks a ball and throws overarm. Sits on a tricycle and propels with feet on the ground. Builds a tower of 6-7 blocks. Turns pages, removes wrapping from objects. Copies a drawing of a vertical line. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May balance on one foot, walk on tiptoes, walk upstairs using alternate feet and begins to walk downstairs using one foot per step. Rides tricycle using pedals and dodges obstacles. Builds a tower of 9-10 blocks and builds bridges. Holds a pencil in mature grip using preferred hand. Copies drawings of both circle and cross. Draws a person with three identifiable parts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves walking, running and climbing skills. Introduce a bicycle with training wheels. Improves drawing skills and learns to write some numbers and letters.
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates vocally by crying. Can be startled by sudden noise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops awareness of surrounding sounds. Recognises parent's voices and responds with coos and various patterns of pitch and cry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laughs and babbles with increasing tone and intensity. Enjoys being read to and looking at picture books. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laughs, giggles and makes sounds to get attention. Imitates sounds, repeats syllables, responds to conversation with babble. Responds to 'no'. Recognises varying emotional tones of parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses most sounds in the language. Says three recognisable words. Understands several words and simple commands. Reacts vocally to music. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Says 6-12 recognisable words. Repeats last words of sentences. Shows desires by pointing or urgent vocalisation or words. Joins in some nursery rhymes. May call self by name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Says 50 or more recognisable words and can understand more. Starts to use two or more word combinations. Joins in some nursery rhymes. May call self by name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constantly asks questions. Listens to and tells stories. Knows own name and age. Understands adjectives, adverbs and some prepositions; uses plurals. Uses less 'baby talk' in speech. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take time to talk with your child about their day. Continue reading to your child as well as listening to your child read to help them to learn.
Learning and Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watches mother/carer. Follows things over short distances with eyes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Displays more deliberate behaviour. Begins to repeat enjoyable chance movements, for example, thumb sucking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes greater interest in surroundings. Tries to prolong interesting happenings discovered accidentally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognises partly hidden objects. Develops awareness of cause and effect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Searches for a hidden object. Shows great interest in surroundings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knows names of body parts and can point to them. Begins to pretend and imitate in play. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retains mental picture of absent object. Infers cause from observing effects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sees the world only in relation to self. Recognises and names 2-4 colours. Counts by rote to ten. Active imagination. Asks questions about surroundings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands meaning of numbers. Learning to add and subtract. Identifies four colours and shapes. Can repeat sentences.
Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds to needs by crying and usually stops when picked up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows a particular type of temperament, e.g. placid or excitable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting to develop wariness of strangers and parent separation anxiety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expresses feelings, likes and dislikes. Frustrated if activity interrupted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows sensitivity to approval and disapproval. Developing ability to trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wants to be more independent and do things without help. Shows personality traits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unaware of the concept of sharing belongings or attention. May begin to delay own satisfaction to please others. Demands parent's attention. Asserts own will and tests behaviour limits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows independence by feeding, dressing and toileting self. Shows pride in accomplishing new tasks. Selects own books, games, toys and friends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoys discovering, learning and new experiences. Shows definite personality traits.
Sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varies sleep patterns. Sleeps much of the time except when being handled. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May extend sleeping time beyond four hours. Longer waking times. Can be unsettled in late afternoon or early evening. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sleeps less during the day. May be ready to sleep in a cot. Seventy per cent of babies sleep through the night. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sleeps 7-10 hours each night. Eighty-three per cent of babies sleep through. Takes 2-3 naps during the day. May start bedtime rituals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Settling into routine sleep and wake times, but may still wake at night. Has 1-2 daytime naps. Continues bedtime rituals, including stories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stabilises sleep and wake patterns. Sleeps 11-12 hours at night; has one daytime nap. Ensure that your child has a balance between activity and rest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has fewer daytime naps. May wake at night with nightmares or fears. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can still need daytime rest but not sleep. Protests less at bedtime. Sleeps between 8-14 hours at night. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sleeps for an average of 12 hours. May be irritable and tired in early evening.
Toileting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has dark and sticky bowel motions after birth. Colour, consistency and frequency of bowel motions depends on type of feeding. No bowel or bladder control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bowel motions vary in colour, frequency and consistency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type of bowel motions depends on diet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passes fewer bowel motions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be aware of being wet or soiled. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May indicate need to go to the toilet by restlessness or vocalisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be toilet trained in daytime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toilet trained in daytime and increasingly at night. May have 'accidents'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toilet trained in daytime. Bedwetting may still occur at night.
Sexuality / Reproduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baby boy's penis can be erect at times. This is a reflex action of which he is not aware. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins to touch genitals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases frequency of touching genitals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins to show awareness of differences between boys and girls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aware of gender differences. Touches and explores own body. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knows gender of self and others. Adopts culturally prescribed behaviours and roles. May be curious about body differences between genders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play generally represents typical sex roles, for example, 'mothers and fathers'.
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depends totally on parents or carers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows preference for parents or carers. Smiles easily and behaves more predictably. Relates to other family members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognises familiar faces and starts to interact more with others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases interaction with family members and plays simple games. Enjoys and demands attention and affection. Wary of strangers and anxious when separated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likes to show affection and always be near parents. Helps with dressing by holding arm for sleeve and foot for shoe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternates between clinging and resistance. Remains emotionally dependent on familiar adults. Plays alone but likes being near adults or family members. Joins in family routines. Can be possessive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases independence but still constantly demands parent's attention. Clings tightly in affection, fear or fatigue; jealous of attention to other children. Plays alongside other children but is unable to take turns unless supervised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separates more easily from parents. Likes to help adults with home activities. Plays well with other children and begins to understand how to share and take turns. Develops a sense of humour and a concern for others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops relationships with school peers. Learns about basic social structures. May show signs of sibling rivalry at home.
Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses and behaviour of parent and baby are influenced by parent expectations, adjustment to parenthood, levels of fatigue, anxiety and confidence as well as baby's temperament. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cries for attention; usually responds and settles with a change of activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocalises to get attention and have needs met. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Becomes frustrated by restricted movements. Likes parents to be close by. Curious, distracted by new objects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looks for a parent when out of view. Can be upset if parent is absent but handles new situations well if parent is involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is easily frustrated; throws occasional temper tantrums. Likes to use objects and routines for comfort and security, for example, teddy bear or special rug. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Throws temper tantrums when frustrated but can be distracted. Shows resistance by using delaying tactics. Starts to develop an imagination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreases temper tantrums. Beginning to understand the need to defer some pleasures to the future. May revert to earlier behaviours at times of change, for example, a new baby in the family. May develop fears of the dark or animals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows independence but may become frustrated when tired, angry or embarrassed. Responds to consistent management and needs limits set.
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of child's values and social development are shaped on the values of the parents. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds to parents disapproval without understanding reasoning behind it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins to understand the meaning of 'no'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imitates the actions of parents and family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learns right from wrong according to consequences (praise for correct behaviour, punishment for wrong). Unable to remember unpleasant response to unwanted behaviour unless reminded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows willingness to accept parent's expectations, views and rules but finds them difficult to follow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopts values that reflect those of parents. Questions issues such as life/death, right/wrong, existence/non-existence of God.