



News from the  
**Healthy Steps  
National Evaluation**

Volume 1, Issue 1

## We are writing to you with exciting news!

As the first phase of the National Evaluation of Healthy Steps draws to a close, we are pleased to share with you some of what we have learned about this important, new approach to delivering health care to young children.

Since some of you enrolled in Healthy Steps as many as seven years ago, we thought you might want to read again a brief description of the program and the National Evaluation. We also highlight here some of the early findings and update the status of the evaluation.

Thank you again for your continued dedication and commitment to the national evaluation of Healthy Steps. We greatly appreciate the time you have spent talking to our interviewers and filling out our questionnaires. Only through your family's unique contributions are we able to learn more about children's growth and development and how best to promote the well-being of children across the country. We hope you will continue with us in this important work!



## What is Healthy Steps?

The Healthy Steps for Young Children Program is an exciting, new approach to delivering primary pediatric health care for children from birth to age three. It expands pediatric services beyond those concerned solely with the physical health and development of young children and supports a closer partnership between health care professionals and parents. Healthy Steps provides a family-centered approach in treating the whole child.

The cornerstone of the program is the addition of a new health care professional, the Healthy Steps Specialist, into the pediatric practice. The Healthy Steps Specialist brings expertise in early childhood development and oversees the delivery of the Healthy Steps services which include:

- Enhanced well child care
  - ◆ access to a child development specialist
  - ◆ developmental assessments
  - ◆ Reach Out And Read™
- Home visits
- Parent handouts
- Parent groups
- Telephone support
- Links to community resources

## What is the National Evaluation of Healthy Steps?

The National Evaluation of Healthy Steps was designed to find out whether the program:

- changed pediatric care to emphasize child development;
- increased parents' knowledge about the early care of infants and the importance of parents' involvement in their children's development;
- promoted parents' practices that improved the health and well-being of their children.

Fifteen pediatric clinics across the country participated in the National Evaluation. Across these sites, 5,500 families like yours enrolled in the study. Some families were offered the Healthy Steps program. Other families were offered excellent, standard pediatric care, without additional Healthy Steps services. **All** families were vital to the successful evaluation of the Healthy Steps program.

For more information about the Healthy Steps program or evaluation, please visit [www.healthysteps.org](http://www.healthysteps.org)

## Early Effects of Healthy Steps on Parenting Practices

Compared to mothers who did not receive the Healthy Steps program, mothers who received Healthy Steps were:

- 24% **less** likely to place their newborns on their stomachs to sleep, thus reducing the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- 22% **more** likely to show picture books to their infants every day and 24% **more** likely to play with their infant every day.
- 22% **less** likely to have given their newborns water. Water is not recommended in early infancy due to the need for nutrition.

For a complete description of the early effects of Healthy Steps, please see an article by Cynthia Minkovitz and her colleagues (2001) available on the Healthy Steps website.

We are busy working with the data from all three years of the study. The early results are exciting! We will be sending you another newsletter with the final results at the end of this year. Please stay tuned!

## On-going Evaluation Activities

The evaluation team at Johns Hopkins University is now following up with you and families like yours who participated in the National Evaluation of Healthy Steps. The goals of this follow-up study as children turn 5½ years old are to:

- describe parenting practices for preschool children;
- study the on-going and new effects of Healthy Steps at school age.

These important findings will inform health care providers and policy makers as they decide whether to support future programs similar to Healthy Steps. We greatly appreciate your past participation in this important study and we hope you will continue to partner with us!

