

South Birmingham Healthy Start Vitamin Distribution Case Study

Healthy Start is a statutory scheme providing a nutritional safety net and encouragement for breastfeeding and healthy eating for over half a million pregnant women and children under 4 in low income and disadvantaged families across the UK.

Healthy Start vitamin distribution is a key aspect of this scheme. To date the distribution nationally is very low with only 1.9% of children's drops and 2% of maternal tablets being issued to the eligible population (DH England Q1 10/11). There have been several challenges associated with this including: the supply and distribution of the supplements and associated data monitoring and reporting; training for health and other professionals working with families and children and raising awareness amongst the public.

In South Birmingham, Healthy Start vitamins were predominately distributed via the health visiting teams, with midwives also signposting families to distribution points. However, the number of distribution sites was limited, with vitamins often only being available during clinic times.

A steering group has been established and subsequent meetings have been held with health visiting and midwifery services as well as extensive Children's Centre involvement. This has also been supported by the Director of Public Health raising the profile with the PCT board. A robust system for distribution, monitoring and reporting mechanisms is in place. Two thirds of the Children's Centres in South Birmingham are now distributing Healthy Start vitamins with plans for the remaining Children's Centres to start distributing shortly.

Over the past 12 months in South Birmingham there has been a concerted effort to raise the profile of the importance of the vitamins which has resulted in a steady increase in the distribution rates of both the children's drops and the maternal tablets.

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