Working with Families to Reduce Non-emergent ED Visits.

Four Minnesota health plans (Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota and Blue Plus, HealthPartners, Medica and UCare) and the Minnesota Head Start Association (MHSA) are working together on a Performance Improvement Project to reduce non-urgent Emergency Department (ED) use among families with young children ages 0-5. Your patients may be participating in the program!

Why is this important? Low health literacy is a problem in every community. Many of us struggle to understand what to do when we or our children get sick. Often young families use the ED when they do not know what else to do or where else to go. The goal of this project is to work with Head Start families to reduce non-urgent ED visits. This project will:

- Provide resources to parents to help them become more engaged in the health care system
- Empower parents to make good decisions about how to care for their child when they are sick
- Teach parents how to utilize health care resources in the most appropriate way.

Why collaborate with Head Start? MHSA is a well-established community resource that provides comprehensive services including education, parent involvement, health, nutrition, and social services. MHSA works with over 15,000 families of children from birth – prekindergarten across the state, of which 80% participate in Minnesota Health Care Programs (MHCP).

What will Head Start do with the families? The project utilizes the book What to Do When Your Child Gets Sick. Head Start staff members have been trained to work with families to understand how to use this book to answer questions when their child is sick.

What do parents learn? The book includes information on many childhood illness and injuries and covers the following areas for each topic:

- What is it?
- What do I see?
- What can I do at home?
- When do I call the doctor or nurse?

And that’s not all! Head Start staff work with families to make sure every family has a primary care clinic and explains the importance of preventive care. Participating families also learn about urgent care centers available in their community and nurse lines that are available to them through their clinic or health plan.

Early Success Story: One Head Start Health Coordinator reported working with a young mother who had been to the ED four times with her newborn. She has not been back since learning how to use the book and access her clinic and nurse line.