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By Bretta McWhorter Sember

It's one of your worst nightmares: You leave your baby with a sitter or a relative, but while you're away, the baby needs medical care. Most parents don't realize they need to prepare certain documents so their baby can be properly cared for if an emergency strikes. While you don't want to think about this possibility, taking steps to make sure your child will receive needed care can take a burden off your mind. "It's one less thing to worry about," says Sharon Wren, mother of two in East Moline, IL. "I'm never more than an hour or two away from [my children], but if they're in an emergency room in pain, that's a long time."

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mation you have from the parent, the better. When parents don't believe in something like transfusions, they should write their preferences down and have it notarized."

MEDICAL HISTORY

While many parents do think to sign a consent form, not as many realize how important it can be to leave a complete medical history with a babysitter/caregiver. Kris Bordessa of Placerville, CA says she "created a simple list of information that might be needed in case my son became ill or was injured. The list included such things as the doctor's name and phone number, allergies, medical conditions and insurance information... My mom kept the information on hand in case she ever needed it." It may also be a good idea to store this type of information in a child's backpack or in the diaper bag, so you have it with you wherever you go.

Deborah Elias of Stephens City, VA has a similar system for her two children: "I leave a list of drug allergies for each child and a record of their vaccinations. I have them on a card for each child. I also include their social security numbers, a copy of the insurance card, doctor's name and phone number and any other pertinent information."

The AAP has created a medical history form for parents to complete and give to caregivers. Download it at www.aap.org/advocacy/eif.doc or ask your pediatrician for a medical history.

INSURANCE

The AAP policy statement says that emergency care must be provided to children and states that "Financial reimbursement should not limit the minor patient's access to emergency medical care." This doesn't mean, however, that an intake clerk isn't going to give a caregiver a hard time about not having insurance information available. Your pedia-

trician will have your child's insurance information on file, but it's always a good idea to give your caregiver a copy of your child's insurance information.

With a little planning, you can be sure your baby will receive needed care any time you are absent. ☺

About the author: Brette McWhorter Sember is a mother of two, a former attorney and the author of twelve books, including The Visitation Handbook: Your Complete Guide to Parenting Apart.

HEALTH & SAFETY

If you'd like more information about protecting the safety and health of your child, these websites can help. Just click over to ePregnancy.com, scroll down our home page to the Go Codes section and type in the numbers below:

The AAP Go 7713

The mission statement of the American Academy of Pediatrics is "Committed to the attainment of optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents and young adults." Their site offers information on topics from vaccinations to dealing with childhood disease.

Bright Futures Go 7714

This website is designed to give parents, healthcare professionals, families and communities information on child health. It has links to programs promoting the health of children, and to newsletters and other publications that cover topics such as breastfeeding, preventing violence and much more.

March of Dimes Go 7715

The March of Dimes is dedicated to saving the lives of children. Their site has information about healthy

Whenever physicians or other medical care providers treat a child, they need to be certain that the parent has provided consent for the child to receive care. When parents bring their baby to a doctor's office or emergency room, they provide the necessary consent. But what happens when parents are away and can't accompany the baby?

NON-EMERGENCY CARE

Non-emergency care providers cannot provide treatment without parental consent. Peter Welty, MD, FAAP and director of pediatrics at Miller Children's Hospital in Long Beach, CA, explains, "When a child comes into our office without a consent, we make every effort to obtain consent and see the child. We do this by calling a parent or guardian and obtaining verbal consent or requesting a faxed written consent. If the child does not have [written] consent and we are unable to obtain one by phone, we cannot, unfortunately, treat the child."

To fully plan for an absence from your child, it is best to prepare a written consent form giving the caregiver permission to obtain any needed emergency or non-emergency medical care for your child in your absence. You can prepare a single "blanket" authorization, giving a relative or friend permission to get any medical care for your child at any time, or you can create a separate form for each absence, noting the dates you will be away and the person you are authorizing. Notarizing the form will make sure it will be accepted but is not always necessary.

Ashley Cordes of Columbia, SC dealt with a situation where her child needed medical care in her absence. "While we were away, my daughter came down with strep throat. My doctor's office would not have seen her without an authorized caregiver, so... she would have had to wait until we got home. Also, if

we had not made it a blanket authorization (as opposed to emergency-treatment only), she would have had to be taken to the emergency room instead of simply to the pediatrician's office." Cordes adds, "Our homemade form worked fine, but in the future, I would consult the pediatrician's office first and use [their] prepared form to alleviate any potential problems." If you ask them, most pediatricians can provide you with a consent form they prefer.

If your baby has ongoing medical problems, it's a good idea to notify your healthcare provider when your baby will be in the care of someone else. Sandra Ray of Midland, TX understands the importance of this idea. "My daughter has been

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chronically ill since six weeks old," she says. "My advice is plan ahead... I make it a point to let the doctor's office know if I'll be out of town for an extended period of time. I think this has helped to eliminate some confusion."

EMERGENCY CARE

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recently stated that emergency room physicians should treat a child whether or not a parent has provided consent. Dr. Jane Knapp, emergency room physician at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City and chairperson of the AAP Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine, explains the policy: "The rule of thumb is to do what's in the child's

best interest. A person bringing in a child is acting 'in loco parentis,' in place of the parent. We assume they will act as a parent. I go ahead and treat the child without a written consent. In life-threatening or limb-threatening emergencies, I do what saves the child's life or limb."

If your baby is seriously ill and is taken to an emergency room while you're away, no consent form is needed in order for him or her to receive treatment in your absence. However, that doesn't mean you don't need to plan for these emergencies. Dr. Ronald Furnival, associate professor of medicine at the University of Utah School of Medicine, physician at Primary Children's Medical Center and member of the AAP Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine, says, "I would recommend that families leave clear plans for caregivers about what to do and who to contact if an emergency arises. A consent form may be part of that process, but is technically not necessary for true emergencies."

Dr. Knapp says that the most important information to leave is your contact information. "It's important to leave an emergency contact for the doctor to have. Often, I want to talk to parents directly, and non-emergency care could be delayed until I talk to the parent."

Dawn Nowakowski of Indianapolis, IN notes that when she and her partner left their child with a caregiver during a trip, "We included as many phone numbers as possible — home, office, two cell phones — so that if medical attention were necessary, [reaching] us would be as easy as possible."

Dr. Knapp points out that it's important for parents to write down instructions about treatment they don't allow. "When religious or cultural beliefs come into play, we try to avoid conflicting with the belief," she says. "The more infor-