

Child and family policy in Finland

Child welfare and care

The aim of Finland's family policy is to create a safe environment for children to grow up in and to provide parents with the material and psychological means to have and raise children.

In Finland, support for families consists of three elements: financial support, services and family leaves. The most important forms of support for families are child benefit and day-care services, as well as maternity and child health clinics.

Finland's healthcare and social welfare system

Finland's healthcare and social welfare system is founded on government-assisted municipal healthcare and social welfare services. The basic services that must be available in every municipality are defined by law. In addition to the public sector, services are available from various private companies. Finland also has an extensive network of third sector providers of both unpaid and paid health and social services.

Child welfare

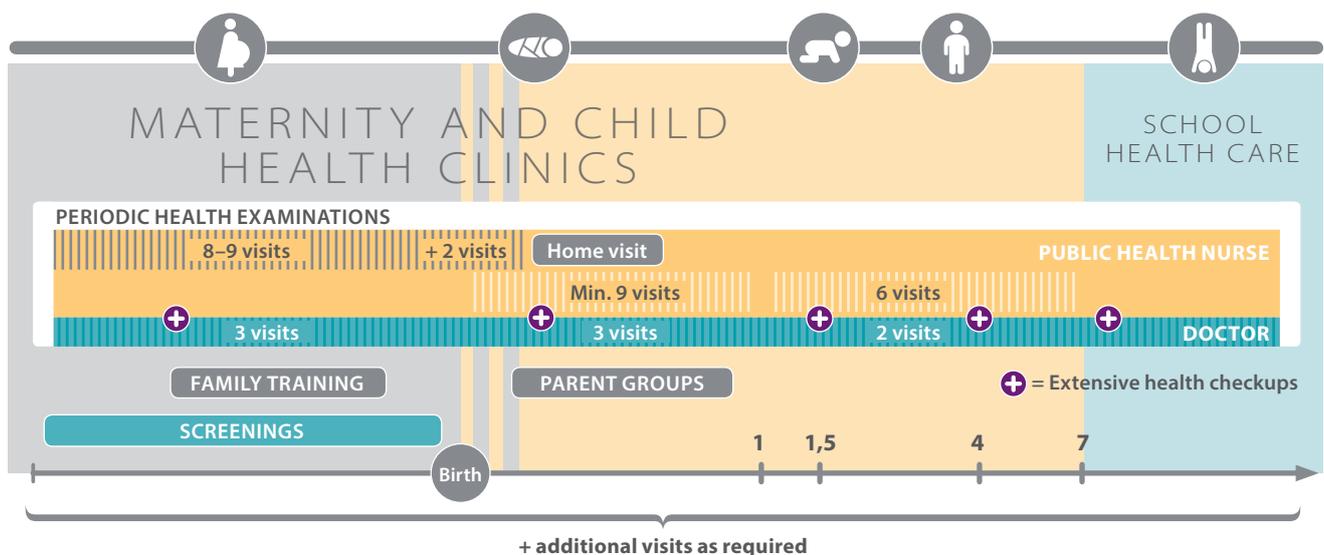
Municipal health centres operate primary health care, which includes maternity and child health clinics as well as school healthcare services. These services are provided locally, and they are voluntary and free of charge for residents.

The primary objective is to monitor and promote the health and welfare of children, adolescents and families. Another objective is to identify any need for special support as early as possible and to provide assistance and refer patients to further examinations and treatment when needed.

Maternity health clinics

Almost all pregnant women use the services of the maternity health clinics. Most fathers accompany their partner to the clinic, where a public health nurse monitors the mother's health, the baby's development and the whole family's wellbeing at regular intervals. Periodic health examinations give healthcare

MATERNITY AND CHILD HEALTH CLINICS



professionals the opportunity to engage the parents in discussions about the family's circumstances, health issues and preparedness for parenthood. The clinics also arrange family training groups. Mothers are offered screenings and various tests during pregnancy.

Child health clinics

All new mothers receive a home visit from a public health nurse shortly after giving birth. At least nine visits to a child health clinic are scheduled for the first year of a child's life to monitor the wellbeing of the child and parents. This is followed by a total of at least six check-ups scheduled first at six-monthly and then at yearly intervals.

The parents meet with a public health nurse and a doctor to discuss the child's health, the whole family's wellbeing and circumstances, parenthood and life-style. Check-ups at the child health clinic monitor and promote the physical, psychological and social development and health of the child as well as the parents' resources and coping. Additional appointments are scheduled in order to provide support to the child and family as required. Families can also be referred to examinations and treatment in other branches of the healthcare and social welfare system. All routine vaccinations are given at the child health clinic. On starting school, children switch to the school health-

care system, with regular yearly check-ups and a programme of routine vaccinations

Early childhood education and care

Various forms of childcare are available to families. After the parental leave period, parents have three government-assisted forms of childcare to choose from until the child starts school, usually at the age of 7:

- municipal day care either in a day care centre or in the home of a family day care provider,
- private day care either in a day care centre or in the home of a family day care provider, subsidised through a private day care allowance, or
- if the child is under the age of 3, one parent can stay at home on child home care allowance.

Day care and preschool

Local authorities are responsible for the provision, quality and supervision of early childhood education and care services. All parents of children under school age have a right to place their child in municipal day care, regardless of their financial situation or whether they are in paid employment. Day care is provided by trained personnel. Local authorities charge day-care fees according to the size and income of families. Children start compulsory preschool at age 6. Pre-primary education is provided both in kindergartens and in schools.

