

The **early childhood education teacher** shows parents and childhood educators what to do to improve children's ability to learn and develop.

As well as individual support, the Babies at Home program runs a number of activities for groups of children, such as:

- Playgroup
- Hydrotherapy
- Mobility Skills Clinics
- School Readiness Program

and operates an outreach service in conjunction with the program supporting children at school.

What is spina bifida

Spina bifida is a complex condition which affects the spine, brain and other organ systems. It develops early in pregnancy and is the most common permanently disabling birth defect.



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Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus
Queensland

Babies at Home Program



**Helping with the
learning and
development of
babies with spina
bifida**

The Babies at Home Program

The Babies at Home Program provides family support and therapy: physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language pathology as well as early childhood education to families of children with spina bifida from the time of diagnosis until they start school.

These years are the most important in children's lives because this is the time of maximum development and the time that children learn best. It is at this time also that the foundation for their future needs to be laid down.

Family support, which is provided by two social workers, begins when a parent contacts SBH Queensland for assistance or information. It may be when they learn that their unborn child has spina bifida or been told that their new born baby has spina bifida.

The Babies at Home Program receives no government funding and relies entirely on donations.

All donations \$2 and over are tax deductible



Family support includes:

- Support throughout the pregnancy and after the baby is born
- Counselling via phone calls and home visits
- An *Information for New Parents* package
- Links to other families if requested
- Activities including parent groups, playgroups, information sessions and other SBH Queensland functions
- Linking country families to appropriate local services
- Attending hospital spina bifida clinics to support families especially those from North Queensland and country areas
- Regular telephone contact and outreach trips for country families

Once at home families are introduced to SBH Queensland therapists who help them to understand the complexities of spina bifida and what impact it will have on their baby's development.

More importantly they are able to provide therapy to the babies and advice and equipment to the families to help the babies meet their developmental milestones in the best possible way and time.

Physiotherapists assist children with movement and mobility. They provide advice on mobility aids and equipment.

Occupational therapists help with continence management and fine motor (hand) skills. They also assess babies' various skills and use toys and other equipment in activities to help them overcome problem areas.

Babies with spina bifida can have problems feeding. Difficulty in sucking, swallowing and breathing can make it difficult for them to get the proper nutrition they need to grow and develop. A **speech and language therapist** works with children to help them overcome these problems.