

Parental awareness of vitamin D for children under five years

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The UK Department of Health advises that all children from 6 months to 5 years (y) receive vitamin supplementation, including vitamins A, C and D, in the absence of more than 500 ml of infant formula per day⁽¹⁾. Recent data from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey shows that UK children under 5 y are generally meeting vitamin recommendations, with the exception of vitamin D⁽²⁾. The UK Healthy Start Scheme (HSS, 2006) includes provision of free vitamin supplements to infants of qualifying families, however uptake of the scheme in Northern Ireland is low⁽³⁾. The aim of this pilot study was to investigate parental awareness of vitamin D supplementation and the HSS for children under 5 y in Northern Ireland (NI).

An online questionnaire was developed using a web-based survey builder (SurveyMonkey©). Parents/carers (18 y+), with at least one child under 5 y and living in NI were invited to take part in the study via a local parenting programme, email distribution lists and social networking sites. With respect to their child/children under 5 y, parents were asked their perceived importance of vitamin D, the extent of vitamin D advice received from a healthcare professional (HCP), provision of vitamin D containing supplements and awareness of the HSS. General demographic information was also collected.

A total of 47 responses have been collected to-date. The majority of respondents were female (98%); from an urban area (49%); married (72%); educated to postgraduate level (38%) and employed full time (53%). A large proportion of respondents regarded vitamin D as very or extremely important (67%), however, only 28% reported giving their child a vitamin D-containing supplement every day (Figure 1).

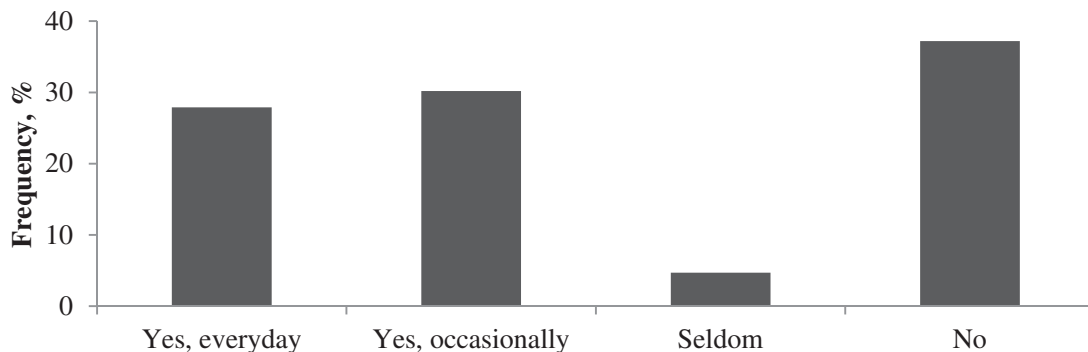


Figure 1. Use of vitamin D supplements in children under 5 years (n = 43).

Over three quarters of respondents reported that they had never received advice about vitamin D from a HCP (75%), and a similar proportion reported that they would like to receive more (72%). The vast majority of the sample had not heard about the HSS (69%).

Even in a well-educated sample with a high level of awareness regarding the importance of vitamin D for children under 5 y, provision of daily vitamin D supplementation was low. Results from this pilot study suggest inadequate dissemination of vitamin D advice from HCPs, however this must be confirmed in a wider population group. Further research on HCPs knowledge, potential training needs and barriers in relation to dissemination of vitamin D supplementation in children under 5 y may be warranted.

1. Department of Health. 2012. Vitamin D – advice on supplements for at risk groups. http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/DH_132509.
2. Department of Health. 2011. National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Headline results from Years 1 and 2 (combined) of the rolling programme 2008/9–2009/10. http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsStatistics/DH_128166.
3. Walker A (2007). *The Journal of Family Health Care*; 17 (2); 53–55.