Development during early childhood lays the foundation for health, education, social, employment & economic outcomes throughout the life course. Many New Zealand children spend time in early childhood education settings, making them an ideal location for health promotion; particularly as settings-based approaches to health promotion are more effective in terms of addressing health inequities.

Reviews of health promotion interventions in early childhood education (ECE) settings suggest some small-to-modest improvements in health-related behaviours and outcomes among children.

- **Sun safety** policies, education (for staff & children) & environmental changes (such as shade provision) in ECE settings can increase the use of sunscreen, hats & shade.
- **Structured activity sessions & guidelines** in ECE settings can increase the intensity and duration of children's physical activity.
- **Social & emotional education programmes** can improve social & emotional skills, learning engagement, social behaviour & decrease conduct problems.
- **Nutrition policies** in ECE settings can improve staff’s food-related practices, support breastfeeding, increase children's intake of fruit, vegetables & water, decrease children’s intake of foods high in salt/fat/sugar.
- **Little evidence was available on oral health promotion in ECE settings. However, tooth brushing and water promotion interventions in other settings are promising.**
- **Promoting hand washing & hand sanitiser use after toileting & before handling food** can decrease the number of gastrointestinal & respiratory illness episodes.

There are several common characteristics among the most effective interventions. They:

- Modify the environment to enable healthy choices
- Produce written policies & guidelines
- Integrate health-related activities into the curriculum
- Provide education opportunities to ECE setting staff
- Ensure ECE setting staff role model healthy behaviours
- Participate in structured external health promotion programmes
- Use multicomponent interventions
- Engage, involve, educate & empower parents

For more information, please refer to Community & Public Health’s rapid evidence review on health promotion in early childhood education settings (2018), at www.cph.co.nz