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Working pressures increase children attending nursery with respiratory tract infections

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Working parents are often caught between the needs of their sick child and their job, which can lead to continued day care use even when their child is ill. New research has found children going to nursery when they are unwell with respiratory tract infections (RTIs) may be an important factor in the spread of these illnesses in the community.

The findings, to be presented today [Thursday 6 March] at the South West Society for Academic Primary Care (SW SPAC) meeting, explored why parents send their children to nursery when they are unwell.

The Parents' Choices About Daycare (PiCArD) study, funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) School for Primary Care Research (SPCR), interviewed 31 parents about the decisions they make when their children are unwell. The research team explored parents' attitudes towards illness, what they currently do if their child is unwell and due to attend nursery, as well as any changes that could affect the decisions they make.

Results from the study showed that parents viewed coughs and colds as less serious and not contagious in the same way as sickness and diarrhoea symptoms.

Dr Fran Carroll, Research Associate in the University of Bristol's Centre

for Academic Primary Care and lead author of the study, said: "Parents are aware that sending their child to nursery when they are unwell is not always the ideal thing to do, but there are often other factors meaning it is not possible to keep their child at home.

"However, there are some changes that nurseries could make which may help parents with their decisions and reduce the spread of infectious illnesses in both children and staff in nursery environments."

The research found parents made decisions not only based on what the nursery policy was around illness, but also on practical issues such as missing time from work, financial consequences, and the availability of alternative care.

Parents also named some nursery factors that could be changed to help them keep unwell children at home. These included a reduction in nursery fees if the child cannot attend, being able to swap sessions, and clearer guidance on nursery sickness policies.

More information: The SW SAPC meeting is hosted by the University of Bristol's Centre for Academic Primary Care on Thursday 6 and Friday 7 March 2014.

Provided by University of Bristol

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