

## New Watsonville program ensures no baby goes home without a doctor and insurance

WATSONVILLE -- From day one, babies born in Watsonville are given access to a pediatrician and get signed up for medical insurance under a new pilot program called Baby Gateway.

The program also provides a crash course for parents in how to take care of an infant, including what signs indicate the child needs to see a doctor or visit the emergency room.

About 800 newborns have participated in the program since it started in August, said officials with Watsonville Community Hospital.

The program is being considered for other hospitals in the county this summer.

"It's a win-win-win scenario for everyone," said pediatrician Barbara Palla, who helped create the program with Watsonville Community Hospital, the county Health Services Agency, First 5, Salud Para la Gente and other health care organizations. "The program also benefits taxpayers by steering babies away from unneeded and expensive emergency department visits."

Baby Gateway begins at the mother and baby's bedside with an adviser from Salud Para la Gente talking with the family to determine their eligibility for MediCal. If the family qualifies for the state health insurance, the adviser walks them through the enrollment process.

Health officials estimate half of the 2,000 babies born in Santa Cruz County qualify for MediCal, though many parents find the application process confusing.

The adviser also helps parents choose an assigned primary physician for her new baby, and the first appointment is scheduled before the family leaves the hospital.

Parents are given a "Kit for New Parents," which includes a set of books and brochures in English, Spanish and Korean.

"That failure to secure care puts babies at needless risk," said Janet Windt, director of perinatal services at Watsonville Community Hospital. "We're truly committed to ensure that every baby gets the best start in life possible, and this program is doing that."