

Health literacy project that reduces unnecessary trips to doctor, ER expands in Lawrence

By Karrey Britt
August 26, 2011



WIC coordinator Jennifer Church, right, talks about how to use the book, "What To Do When Your Child Gets Sick," Thursday, Aug. 25, 2011, at the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department. The book and training are part of a growing Parent Health Literacy Project. From left are Hossein Z. Jooya, left, his 1-month-old son Milan Jooya, and his wife, Kobra Nasiri. By [Mike Yoder](#)

Knowing whether to take your child to the doctor for a fever, rash or insect bite isn't always a simple decision, especially if you're a new parent.

"It's easy to panic and make a trip to the hospital," said Tamika Sellars, 30, of Topeka, and a single mom. Her son, Malachi Gamble, is 2.

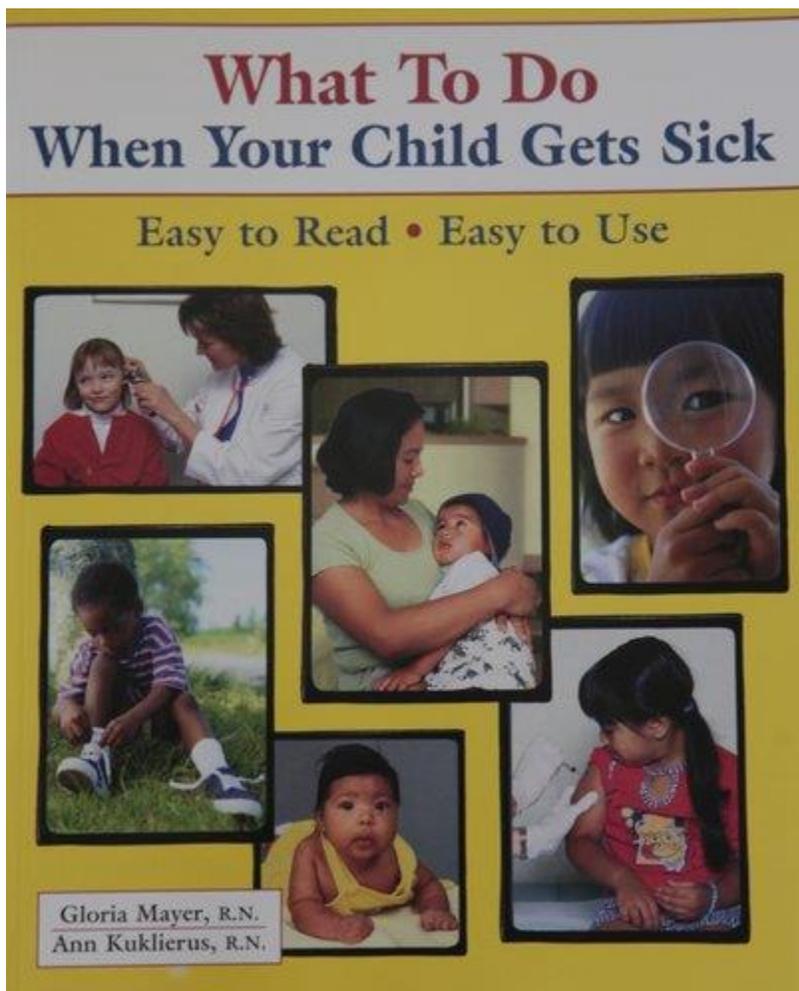
She's glad she received the book, "What To Do When Your Child Gets Sick," through the [Kansas Head Start Association](#).

She believes the book has not only saved her from making unnecessary trips to the emergency room, but also from missing work. When her son's temperature was high, she checked the book and realized that he had a slight fever that didn't warrant a doctor's appointment.

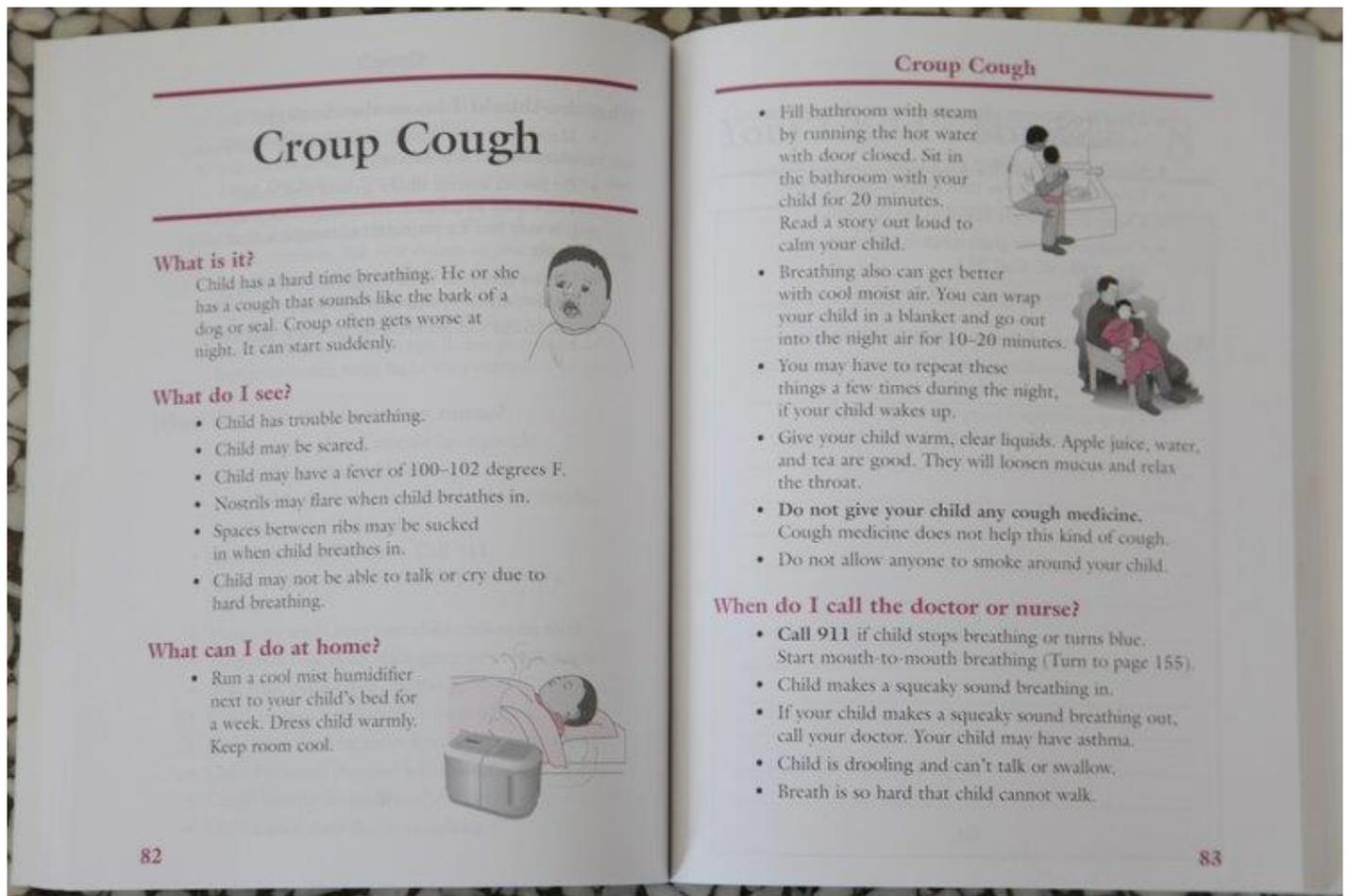
"It's easy to read and it's set up very simple," she said.

The book covers 50 common childhood illnesses, injuries and health problems, such as cough, fever, diaper rash and bug bites. It is for parents of children from birth to age 10, and is written at a fifth-grade level so it's easy to understand. For each health issue, it answers five questions:

- What is it?
- What do I see?
- What can I do at home?
- When do I call a doctor or nurse?
- What else should I know about it?



"What To Do When Your Child Gets Sick" was written by two registered nurses and reviewed by doctors and nurses trained in caring for children. By *Mike Yoder*



"What To Do When Your Child Gets Sick" is written at a fifth-grade level so it's easy to read and understand. By *Mike Yoder*

The book also comes with hands-on training on how to use it, which is the crucial piece, according to Mary Baskett, of Kansas Head Start.

"Many of our families don't have very many, if any, books in the home. They certainly are not familiar with using books as a resource."

She said often they get health information from a friend, family or television.

Sellers is among 6,000 Kansas parents who have received training and the book through Kansas Head Start during the past five years. A recent study shows these parents report:

- 39 percent fewer unnecessary doctor visits.
- 57 percent fewer emergency room visits.
- 60 percent fewer school days missed by children because of illness or injury.

- 47 percent fewer work days missed by parents because of children’s illness.
- 82 percent increased confidence in taking care of their children’s illnesses.

With such promising results, the [United Methodist Health Ministry](#) and Kansas Head Start Assn. are eager to get the book in more parents’ hands. Since 2007, United Methodist Health Ministry has provided \$240,000 in grants for a Parent Health Literacy Project, including a \$112,000, two-year grant in January. With the grant, Kansas Head Start is providing books and training on how to use the books in hospitals, safety net clinics and other health organizations. It started in the Northeast Kansas region.

Since June, the book has been offered through Lawrence safety net clinics, Lawrence Memorial Hospital classes on newborn and baby care, and the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department.

Lawrence residents Hossein Jooya and Kobra Nasiri, and their 1-month-old son, Milan Jooya, were at the health department on Thursday afternoon for a checkup with WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program coordinator Jennifer Church.

During the appointment, she handed them the book and reviewed how to use it.

They were grateful to have the information at their fingertips, especially because they don’t have any immediate family nearby. They tend to “google” things.

“It’s helpful, especially since this is our first child,” Nasiri said.

Deborah Boulware O’Neal, Parent Health Literacy Project director, said the goal is to have these books available in places besides Head Start throughout the state by 2012.

Plans also are under way to have the first Kansas Health Literacy Summit in June in Lawrence. It would target people who are involved in health care.

“We really feel like health literacy can help us raise the level of health for Kansans and also help to control the costs of insurance and costs of health care to the state,” she said.

At Lawrence Memorial Hospital, 3 percent of its patients use the ER for non-urgent care — for treatment of such maladies as a rash, earache, or short-term upper respiratory infection — and could be seen elsewhere.

Another 33 percent fall into a gray area, those people who perhaps could be seen elsewhere.

ABOUT HEALTH LITERACY

There's a national movement to improve health literacy because it not only improves one's health, but it reduces costs on the health system.

So, what is health literacy?

It is an individual's ability to read, understand and use health care information to make decisions and follow instructions for treatment. Studies reveal that up to half of patients cannot understand basic health care information.

According to the [American Medical Association](#), poor health literacy is "a stronger predictor of a person's health than age, income, employment status, education level and race."

Vulnerable populations include: elderly, minority populations, immigrants, low-income individuals and people who have chronic mental and/or physical conditions.

Tagged: [Kansas Head Start Association](#), [health literacy](#), [Parent Health Literacy Project](#)