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Activity Finder, Holiday Highlights & South Bay Section Inside • Extended Calendar Listings at LAParent.com

# family F.Y.I.

## Adoptive Parents Often Become Health Detectives

By Christina Elston

Expectant parents can hardly wait to count the fingers and toes of their healthy newborn. But for parents who are adopting a child, the quest for health information is much more complicated.

"Almost never is all of the information available that a doctor would prefer to have," Nancy Curtis, M.D., says of children available for adoption. Curtis is the medical director of the International Adoption Clinic at Children's Hospital and Research Center in Oakland, Calif.

### Health Note

She urges all prospective adoptive parents to do the best they can in researching the health history of a baby or child. Unfortunately, those who don't make the effort

can get through the adoption process only to find that they now have a child with health issues they aren't prepared to cope with.

Ideally, adoptive parents should be able to find out:

- The mother's age at time of birth, whether she has any history of substance abuse and whether she has had other children;
- The type of facility the child was born in and whether there were complications with the delivery;
- Whether the child was born prematurely or full term, and the baby's weight and head circumference at birth (which can indicate how healthy the pregnancy was);
- Some measure of the child's growth over time and any other developmental information available;
- Any recurrent medical conditions such as anemia, ear infections or heart disease; and
- The results of essential lab tests, such as tests for HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis.

If you are adopting internationally, health information will be more difficult to come by. Ask for help from your adoption agency or hire a research agency, such as the International Adoption Clinic, to do a pre-adoption medical review.

"I highly recommend finding someone who does it all the time," says Curtis. "The records are complicated. You have to sift through the little information that is available to assess medical risk, wringing every last drop of fact out of what you see or read."

Christina Elston is an Altadena mom and senior editor for Dominion Media.

### More Health Updates

For more family health and safety news, tips and resources, check out [Parenthood.com/healthnotes.html](http://Parenthood.com/healthnotes.html). This month, learn more about:

- Killing dust mites in the wash
- Vaccinating toddlers against the flu – without a shot
- The bias against overweight kids
- New information on blood-sugar levels during pregnancy

## Trash to Treasure

Have you had a yard sale, donated stuff to local schools and shelters and still have unwanted goods littering your house? There's a Web site that can connect your potential discards with folks who want them.

Started in May of 2003, Freecycle ([www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org)) features items offered up for nary a penny. Everything posted must be free – whether it's a bike, fax machine, old door, fencing or any household object. Browse the site in hopes of a terrific find or post your goods and clear out that garage. (Take reasonable precautions when posting online or arranging to drop off or pick up items.)

Just log on and sign up for your local group. The rest is shopping and clutter-free bliss.

– Brenda Rees



## The School of Tree-Hugging

With the opening this month of the Mothers' Club Family Learning Center in Pasadena, educators and environmentalists are celebrating the first fully "green" preschool in California and the nation.

The public is invited to an open house from 4-6 p.m. on Nov. 1 to tour the \$6.5-million facility, which has been certified at the Gold Level by the U.S. Green Building Council.

The 10,000-square-foot center boasts solar panels as well as eco-friendly paints, sealants and carpets. Specialty hardscape and roofing materials reduce heat absorption, and a permeable play surface outside allows rain water to better penetrate the soil. Skylights and clerestories keep the area bright. In addition, 75 percent of the former building's structure was reused in the new site. Green-minded cleaning materials and practices will be used once the school is up and running.

The earth-friendly building will offer parent education, an infant and toddler center, a preschool and an outdoor learning center for children.

"For many families we serve, our outdoor play area is their only back yard," says Sue Kujawa, the school's executive director. "Many families have no awareness of the impact of chemicals in cleaning agents, so our 'going green' curriculum is new for them. And for the future, to truly change the cultural attitude toward our planet, we have to start modeling environmental responsibility to children and their parents from the very start."

The Mothers' Club Family Learning Center is located at 980 N. Fair Oaks Ave. in Pasadena. Call 626-792-2687 or visit [www.mothersclub.org](http://www.mothersclub.org). For more information about the U.S. Green Building Council and its green-school ratings system, visit [www.buildgreenschools.org](http://www.buildgreenschools.org).

– Brenda Rees



The Mother's Club Family Learning Center in Pasadena is the nation's first fully "green" preschool.