

## **NURSEMAID'S ELBOW (Subluxation of the Radial Head)**

### **What is a nursemaid's elbow?**

Nursemaid's elbow is also called subluxation of the radial head or a pulled elbow. It is an injury to ligament (a strong band of tissue) that keeps the two bones of the forearm in the correct place.

The two bones in the forearm are the radius and the ulna. The upper end of each one is called the head. The radial and ulnar heads are kept in place by a ligament called the annular ligament. When the annular ligament is torn, a part of it slides upward and becomes trapped in the elbow joint. This is very painful.

This injury is uncommon after age 3.

### **What is the cause?**

Nursemaid's elbow is caused by of a strong force on the elbow. This often occurs when an adult pulls on the child's arm or the child falls away from an adult while being held by the arm.

### **How is it treated?**

Your health care provider will move the bone and the ligament back to their correct positions. This is an easy correction done at the doctor's office. The ligament needs time to heal, so be very gentle with your child's arm. X-rays of the elbow are usually not necessary.

Once the ligament and the radial head are returned to their proper place, the child usually can begin to use his arm again within a few minutes. A few children have a small amount of swelling or pain in the joint. Regular dose of ibuprofen for a few days will help with the swelling and pain.

### **How can I prevent this from happening again?**

Once an elbow has been injured, it is more likely that it will happen again in the future. Do not lift your child by the arm or pull hard on your child's arm.

### **When should I call my child's health care provider?**

Call during office hours if:

- Your child does not use the arm or seems to be in a lot of pain
- You are worried that someone intentionally hurt your child