

Child Care Environment: General Safety Checklist

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This NebGuide offers suggestions on maintaining a safe general environment for children in your care. For more information on safety and children see: G1212 Child Care Furnishings Safety Checklist and G1643 Child Care Environment Room-by-Room Safety Checklist.

Being a child care provider is a major responsibility. It means providing a safe environment for and protecting the children in your care so they can explore their world and develop trust. Accidents are the leading cause of death in children ages 1 to 14 and the leading cause of disability, permanent or temporary, in children older than 1, according to the Centers for Disease Control (1999). Each year in the U.S., 12 million to 14 million children or one in four under 15 need medical attention because of accidental injury.

Medical, safety and health professionals agree that we can prevent most childhood accidental deaths and disabilities. Home accidents usually occur through the child's curiosity about the environment and inattention from parents and childcare providers.

By taking simple precautions and following basic safety rules, we can avoid most accidental injuries. Do not tempt children by leaving dangerous objects around for them to play with, feel or taste. Never leave a child alone in the house or facility. Keep all nooks and crannies free of hazards. Children are imitators and will do things they see you doing. Show them how to do things safely.

People providing child care services as a business should also contact their state health department, fire marshals office and other regulatory agencies for information about their child care facility and business and the regulations that apply. For details on Nebraska state childcare regulations, contact Child Care Licensing, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services at (402) 471-2133.

Common causes of accidental child injuries and deaths:

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|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Poisoning | Drowning | Choking |
| Falls | Fires and Burns | Motor vehicle accidents |
| Firearms | Suffocation | |

Fall Prevention Checklist

For children from birth to 4 years of age, home falls are one of the leading causes of accidental death and serious injury. Because infants differ in temperament and activity, never leave babies unattended on anything from which they might fall. Turning your back even for a moment to get a bottle or diaper can be risky. During the “creeper” or crawling stage, the baby's curiosity is developing. Babies quickly learn to pull themselves up, while pulling down everything else. Toddlers are adventurous and want to explore their environment but do not realize the danger. Older children may take more risks and not realize or forget the dangers involved.

- Always leave the sides up on the baby's crib.
- Use a harness (safety straps) when the baby is sitting in a high chair, carriage, stroller or infant seat.
- Look for labels that certify the item meets the standards of the American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM) or the Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association (JPMA).
- Check tables, chairs and shelving to be sure children cannot overturn them.
- Check for hanging cords, plant vines or table coverings that children might tug. Be sure electric cords to lamps and appliances are up and out of the way.
- Use safety gates at all stairways to prevent the creeping baby from falling downstairs. Avoid accordion gates with large openings that can trap a child's neck.
- Fasten securely doors that lead to stairways, driveways and storage areas. Do not lock needed fire exits. Hooks high up on doors may prevent falls.
- Do not depend on window screens to prevent falls. Screens keep out insects, but may not be strong enough to keep in children. Unguarded windows opened only 6 inches pose a danger to children under 10 years of age. In rooms that children occupy, make sure the window screens are sturdy and secure. Move chairs and other furniture away from windows to discourage climbing. Window guards are available at most hardware stores. Do not put guards on windows used as fire exits.

- Be sure stairways are well lit and never use stairs for storage. Install treads and handrails on them. Do not let children play on stairs.
- Do not use small rugs that skid. In the bathroom, the tub should have a bath mat or “no slip” strips to prevent slipping.
- Teach children where they may and may not climb. Be sure play equipment (public and home) is well maintained, and that there is adult supervision when the children are playing. Ensure surfaces under playground equipment are appropriate such as 12 inches thick of either pea gravel, rubber mulch or wood mulch. NEVER leave children unsupervised, whether in or out of the homes.
- Teach children not to run in the house or facility, and have them pick up their toys to avoid dangerous obstacles.
- Baby walkers are the cause of more injuries than other baby furnishings or items. About 21,300 children under age 15 months old are treated each year for accidents involving baby walkers. Use stationary play stations for short periods of time. Do not use walkers.

Indoor Air Quality

Children are sensitive to indoor air quality problems. Their bodies are smaller and their respiration rates are faster than adults. These differences make children more susceptible to the negative effects of indoor contaminants and pollutants.

- ___ Prevent mold by reducing leaks, moisture and humidity levels.
- ___ Provide fresh air. Change or clean filters in heating and cooling systems often.
- ___ Do not keep products that give off toxic or dangerous fumes inside. Tighten lids on cleaning and maintenance products, hygiene products and perfumes to reduce the volatile organic compounds given off into the air.
- ___ Wet-clean surfaces often. Use a quality vacuum cleaner with a beater bar and with HEPA filters.
- ___ Seal cracks and holes, and repair screens to keep out pests such as rodents, cockroaches, birds or bats that can be asthma triggers for children sensitized to them. Keep trash emptied.
- ___ If pests are a problem inside the home or structure, use integrated pest management (IPM) principles to reduce the problem. Contact local extension offices for information on IPM and low-toxicity controls. Pesticides should not be used when children are present or within 24 to 48 hours of when they may be present. Follow all pesticide label instructions carefully, including re-entry interval guidelines. The American Association of Poison Control Centers, in 2004 alone, estimated 71,000 children were involved in common household pesticide-related poisonings or exposures in the U.S. More information is available on the Web at: http://schoolipm.unl.edu/ipmpolicy/school_ipm.htm

Outdoor play area

- ___ Have a fenced area outdoors where children may play daily. Check the fence for wires that stick out or loose

nails. Walk the children around the boundary to show them where they may play. Check with local and state authorities about fencing regulations for childcare homes or facilities.

- ___ Put away lawn mowers, fertilizers, pesticides and gardening tools.
- ___ Enclose or screen off the air-conditioning unit, water well, access to surface water, and electrical and mechanical equipment.
- ___ Remove doors on old refrigerators and freezers. Children like to hide in these and may suffocate.
- ___ Remove poisonous indoor and outdoor plants, such as oleander, azaleas, castor beans, dieffenbachia, philodendron, caladium and some ivies. Contact a horticulturist or poison control center for more information.
- ___ Do not allow children to play in or around motor vehicles. Shift car gears to park and set the emergency brake if you have to keep a vehicle in the yard. Close the windows, lock the doors, and keep the keys in the house out of children’s reach.
- ___ Make sure the yard is free of rusty nails, broken glass and similar objects.
- ___ Make sure all swings and other play equipment are sturdy and firmly anchored to the ground. The best equipment is simple and adaptable to many uses.
- ___ Check porches, railings and steps for splinters, loose nails and slippery surfaces.
- ___ Mark glass doors with decals or tape at children’s eye level.
- ___ If your home or child care facility is near a swimming pool, creek, pond, irrigation canal or other body of water make sure children cannot wander off to it by themselves and fall in. Enclose swimming pools with a fence at least 5 to 6 feet high and always lock gates. Check local and state regulations.
- ___ If you use a wading or splashing pool, drain and clean it after each use. Store the pool where children cannot reach it. Use a pool that is no more than 1 foot deep. Always watch children when they are using a wading pool because they can drown in just a little water.
- ___ Check tricycles for sharp edges and missing parts. Tricycles with seats close to the ground generally are safer. Provide a bike helmet to children riding bikes.
- ___ Keep 12 inches of wood mulch, rubber mulch or pea gravel beneath swings and slides. Check swings and slides to make sure they have smooth edges, no broken or missing parts, and are well anchored.
- ___ Check all play equipment weekly for loose bolts and screws.
- ___ If the structure or home was built prior to 1978, protect areas around the foundation from children’s access. Old peeling paint or paint scraped off from the exterior may have contaminated the soil nearby with lead.

Car safety checklist

- ___ Consult your highway safety office for state regulations. Motor vehicle crashes are one of the leading killers of young children.

- ___ Get written approval from parents or guardians to transport their children. Consult your attorney or insurance agent about liability and safety issues. Use federally approved car safety seats for all infants and children. Generally, children at least 8 years of age and those weighing more than 80 pounds can buckle-up in regular seat belts. Place children under 1 year of age and those weighing less than 20 pounds in car seats facing backwards in the back seat of the car. Check your state's seat belt laws and your individual auto manufacturer's recommendations for your style of auto. Read the owner's manual for the motor vehicle and the child safety seat instructions for proper installation and use. Do not use a car seat in a location with an airbag.
- ___ Be sure the car seat is appropriate for the child's height and weight.
- ___ Use a child safety seat with harnesses until the children reach 40 pounds. Children are then graduated into a booster seat until they can properly fit in a lap/shoulder belt. Check the instructions for front passenger seat use by older children and air bag restrictions and safety issues.
- ___ Never leave any children alone in a car.

Fire prevention checklist

In case of danger from fire, your first responsibility as the child care provider is to get the children to safety. Fighting a fire is secondary to getting the children out safely. Some professionals will discourage fighting the fire due to lack of knowledge and experience in using the extinguisher and their concern for the person's safety. Call the fire department immediately.

Check with state regulatory agencies such as the state fire marshal's office or local officials about fire prevention regulations and recommendations for safety. Regulations may vary from area to area and for child care homes and child care centers. Ask them to inspect your home or building.

- ___ Keep a 2.5-pound "ABC" dry chemical fire extinguisher in good working order and learn to operate it. Check with regulatory agencies or the fire department about your specific child care home or facility and where to place extinguishers.
- ___ Check smoke alarms monthly and replace batteries every year. Consult with fire authorities about the best placement. Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- ___ Consider a home sprinkler system for ultimate fire protection. Check with state and local regulatory agencies about requirements.
- ___ Always have an adult who knows how to operate fire extinguishers present when children are in your care.
- ___ Service fire extinguishers after each use. At least once a year, have extinguishers serviced and inspected.
- ___ Have at least two unblocked exits from each floor or level to the outside of your childcare home. Two unblocked exits from each room are even safer and may be required. Check with your state and local regulatory agencies about existing codes in your area.
- ___ Make sure the electrical wiring system is in good repair.
- ___ Check the fuses or circuit breakers in the fuse box. Be

sure they are in good operating condition. Do not use a larger fuse than the circuit requires.

- ___ Inspect and make sure the cords for electrical items are in good condition and are approved.
- ___ Extension cords are discouraged from use around children. Do not overload cords or use them as permanent wiring. Do not run them under rugs or across traffic ways, or hook them over nails.
- ___ Have a qualified technician inspect the central heating units as often as the manufacturer recommends. Install carbon monoxide alarms or check the ones currently installed.
- ___ Protect woodburning or gas log fireplaces and open flame heaters with a spark screen or guard. Radiators or other surfaces hotter than 110° F should be protected from children's reach.
- ___ Vent space heaters properly to the outside.
- ___ Always keep lighters and matches where children cannot reach them.
- ___ Store flammable liquids in safety cans where children cannot reach them.
- ___ Do not place rags, paper and other flammable materials near heat.
- ___ Establish a fire escape plan and practice an escape drill monthly.
- ___ Teach children to "stop, drop and roll" in case of clothing fires.
- ___ Electric appliances, cords, etc., should have a safety certification mark by a testing laboratory, such as UL (Underwriters Laboratories) or ETL (Electrotechnical Laboratory).
- ___ Heating and ventilating equipment should be inspected before each cooling and heating season by a professional heating/air conditioning contractor.

Sanitation checklist

For specific sanitation guidelines, contact your local or state social services or health department.

- ___ Keep the home or facility and grounds clean.
- ___ Keep the kitchen, all food preparation, storage and serving areas, and utensils clean.
- ___ If you have pets, keep them clean. Make sure pets have all vaccinations, including for distemper and rabies. Empty kitty litter boxes daily. Some pets may transmit illnesses to children. Some pets can trigger asthma in children sensitized to the pet.
- ___ Use a public water supply or a private well approved by health authorities.
- ___ Keep plumbing in good working condition.

Other

- ___ Have a transistor radio and flashlight with fresh batteries on hand in case of a storm or power failure.
- ___ Purchase or make a disaster kit for use in emergencies such as power failure, storms, flooding or blizzards.
- ___ Post emergency and parents' numbers near the telephone.
- ___ List medical emergency information about each child.

- ___ Arrange for emergency transportation if needed.
- ___ Establish a health policy with parents of children in your care. Require immunization records for each child.

Other Resources

For a more detailed listing of safety guidelines, refer to *Caring for Our Children, Health and Safety Performance Standards for Out-of-Home Child Care*. Chapter 5. Facilities, supplies, equipment and transportation. Published by the American Public Health Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Available from the National Resources Center for Health and Safety in Child Care. [Online]. Available: <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/CFOC/>

Centers for Disease Control. Injury Fact Book 2001-2002.

www.cdc.gov/ncipc/default.htm (Search for fact book)

FireSafety.gov for Kids. U.S. Government site with educational resources to use with children. www.firesafety.gov/kids/parents-teachers/resources.shtm

American Academy of Family Physicians. (2006) familydoctor.org Keeping Your Home Safe for Your Baby. [Online]. Available: <http://familydoctor.org/027.xml>

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