

## Chapter 10: Safe Environments

### Indoor Environment

The majority of time used to care for children will mainly be conducted inside your child care centre. This environment is easier to control and it is the responsibility of staff to ensure it is as safe as reasonably possible. Child proofing your centre will depend on the age of the children in your care. Safety gates at the tops of stairs, electrical outlet covers and cupboard locks are important physical restriction devices that will make your setting safer.

As children explore their environment, they also discover things that may not be safe for them. Chemicals and medications must be stored in an area that children cannot access. Storing them in a locked area will prevent accidental exposure. The selection of toys and materials must be appropriate for the age of children in your care. Staff must conduct researched to ensure toys and materials are safe and must also be aware of current [recalls](#). Items ranging from bed cribs to baby food have been recalled in the past for safety or health concerns.

### Plants

Certain plants may be visually pleasing but may not be safe for a child care centre. Before purchasing live plants ensure that they are acceptable for indoor or outdoor use. Poisonous plants must be removed from the facility.

### A Smoke-Free Environment

Under the [Smoke Free Ontario Act, 2006](#) all child care centres, including licensed private home child care, must be 100% smoke-free. This requirement applies 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, whether or not children are present. Algoma Public Health also encourages unlicensed private home day care premises to keep their facility 100% smoke-free. For 'no smoking' signage contact your local Algoma Public Health office.

### Pets

Algoma Public Health recognizes the benefits to having pets in the child care centre, however, it is not recommended. As an alternative, consider having pets visit the childcare centre rather than reside there. Pets can expose children and staff to infections, injuries or allergens. Children and staff may not initially be allergic to pets but can develop allergies with continued exposure. Physical injury is also a serious concern if the pet has the ability to bite or scratch. All biting or scratching incidents regardless of severity must be reported to Algoma Public Health. Public Health Inspector must investigate all [Animal Bites](#) to assess the risk of rabies transmission.

Dogs and cats may be suitable for a child care centre, however:

- They must be immunized for any disease that can be transmitted from animal to human
- They must be maintained on a flea, tick and worm control program
- Immunization records must be maintained and made available upon request
- Pets are not allowed in the food preparation area

Animals that are not permitted in a child care centre include:

- Iguanas
- Turtles
- Exotic pets such as monkeys, snakes and spiders
- Ferrets
- Stray, wild or dangerous animals
- Birds of the parrot family

If a child care centre chooses to have a suitable pet on site, children and staff must thoroughly wash their hands after handling the pet to reduce the risk of infection. Staff are also responsible for feeding and cleaning the animal and cleaning must be conducted while children are not in attendance.

## **Outdoor Environment**

The outdoor environment also poses hazards and safety concerns, some that we have little or no control of. Concerns with many outdoor hazards can be prevented or reduced to safer levels by proper planning and education. Supervision is always a priority when exploring the outdoor environment.

## **Playground Safety**

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services requires all licensed day nursery operators to develop a playground safety policy. The policy is to provide all staff with the day nursery supervision and programming expectations as well as the requirements to meet the CSA Standard.

Child care centres must inspect the outdoor play ground prior to the use by children daily. The area must be assessed to ensure that all hazards are removed or reduce to a reasonable level prior to use. Playground checks must be documented and must include the following examples:

- Sand boxes covered each night and raked before use.
- Climbers and play equipment secure and in good repair.
- Fences and gates secure.
- Standing water removed.
- Trespassing hazards document.
- Safety concerns document.
- Vegetation maintained.
- Animal waste and garbage removed.
- Toys and mobile play equipment is in good repair.

## **Play Pools**

Although a play pool can be fun, it can also be a source of disease transmission. Children may accidentally swallow water contaminated with fecal matter. For this reason, play pools are not permitted to be used in a child care centre. Using a sprinkler, hose, or individual buckets is a safer alternative for outdoor summer water activities.

## **Car Seat Safety – The Law**

Infants and children should be properly restrained in car seats or booster seats as per Ontario laws. See the Ministry of Transportation website for details and installation

videos at <http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/choose-car-seat.shtml>

If you have questions or would like to book an appointment for a car seat clinic offering education/support with installation and use please contact the Parent Child Information Line at: 705 541 7101 or 1 888 537 5741.

## **Summer Weather Protection**

In the summer, the combination of heat and humidity can put certain individuals at risk for heat related illnesses such as heat stroke and heat exhaustion. Be aware of the symptoms and take action to reduce your risks. Familiarize yourself with local air quality and the effects of [extreme heat](#). Beat the heat and enjoy the summer weather!

Everyone is at risk for heat related illnesses but those at greater risk include children, elderly, people who work outdoors for long periods of time, individuals with certain chronic illnesses such as heart conditions, individuals taking certain medications or those who are unable to move or change positions on their own.

[Sun safety](#) protection is not only a concern in the summer. The UV rays of the sun are present all year round. Always make sure children are properly protected by wearing appropriate clothing and sunscreen when needed.

## **Cold Weather Protection**

Always ensure that children are provided with the proper seasonal attire and are dressed for the weather when heading outdoors. Winters in Northern Ontario can be frigid but when dressed properly still enjoyable. [Wind chill](#) can significantly reduce the feels like temperature and can be very dangerous to not only children but all. Stay current with local weather forecasts and watches and warnings for your area. Alternative arrangements for outdoor play should be made when the temperature is unsuitable for your area.