

Child Care Environment: Room-by-Room Safety Checklist

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This NebGuide offers suggestions on maintaining a safe environment for children in your care by conducting regular room-by-room safety checks. For more information on safety and children see: G1212, Child Care Furnishings Safety Checklist, and G1213, Child Care Environment General Safety Checklist.

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 child care regulations, contact Child Care Licensing, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services at (402) 471-2133.

Providing a safe environment for and protecting the children in your care is important. 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 year of age 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 years of age need medical attention because of accidental injury. By conducting a frequent room-by-room safety inspection, children can safely enjoy the environment in which they learn and grow.

Room Safety Checklist

Use the following room-by-room checklist to evaluate the safety of your child care facility or home. Identify areas and items to improve. **These are basic recommendations for a child-safe environment. For specific safety regulations, check with local or state regulatory agencies such as the health department, social services or fire marshal's office. Regulations vary for child care homes and centers and also from area to area.**

Daily check

Before the children arrive each day, take a quick walk around your child care facility or home and yard to make sure you have a safe environment for them.

- ___ Vacuum or sweep the floors to make sure there are no buttons, coins, paper clips or similar items lying around.
- ___ Put away cleaning fluids, bug spray, cosmetics, medications and other poisonous products that someone in your family may have used.
- ___ Turn pot handles to the back of the stove, and put the hot coffee pot out of reach.
- ___ Put up a gate to the stairs, and latch any doors that you do not want children to use, but do not block fire exits.

Kitchen and dining areas

- ___ Look through all cabinets within children's reach and remove any breakable dishes and sharp items. Leave only plastic containers, paper goods, wooden spoons and metal pots and pans that children can play with to their hearts' content. (Or put a childproof lock on all child-height cabinets.)
- ___ Remove all dishwashing soap, cleansing powder, drain cleaner, laundry detergent, bleach, paint, turpentine, bug spray and similar products from under the sink. Store them out of children's reach. About 40 percent of accidental poisonings occur in the kitchen.
- ___ Check cleaning product containers for original or proper labeling. Store cleaning products so they do not contaminate any food source or play area. Contact the Poison Control Center immediately at (800) 222-1212 if a child has ingested any poisonous item.
- ___ Lock the door to the water heater and any kitchen closets containing dangerous supplies.
- ___ Place knives, ice picks, meat-turning forks and other sharp utensils in top cabinets.
- ___ Eliminate the risk of children scalding themselves by using anti-scald devices on faucets or by setting the water heater temperature at 120° F. (Laundering and dishwashing may require higher water temperatures – 140° F.)
- ___ Unplug toasters, coffee makers and other electrical equipment when not in use and store them out of reach.
- ___ Install approved safety covers to keep children from trying to stick things into outlets. However, children can sometimes get the covers off. Safety covers such as those attached to the receptacle with a screw prevent easy removal by a child.

- ___ Always keep matches out of children's sight and reach.
- ___ Keep hard surface floors from getting slippery by wiping up spills promptly.
- ___ Make sure chairs and high chairs are sturdy and not easily overturned. Place toddlers in high chairs that come with straps or harnesses.
- ___ Install a smoke detector close to the kitchen but not so close that it will go off every time you cook. Install a smoke detector or detectors between the children's area and the kitchen. Do a monthly safety check and replace batteries every year. Smoke detectors generally have a life of about 10 years. Replace those that are older than that.
- ___ Keep an all-purpose fire extinguisher in the kitchen, one rated for grease and electrical fires and learn how to operate it. Be sure you or a staff member is trained to operate the extinguisher. Have it checked and serviced once a year. Ask about regulations in your area. Remember, however, your first responsibility is to get the children out safely and call the fire department.
- ___ Cover trash containers.
- ___ Turn handles of pots and pans on the stove to the back of the stove.
- ___ Make sure adults and children wash their hands when preparing food, before and after meals, and after toileting or diapering.
- ___ Inspect and remove eating utensils with chips or cracks.

Bathroom

- ___ Lock medicine cabinets, or place medicine, razors and glass bottles well out of reach of climbing, curious children.
- ___ Check under the sink and remove cleanser, shampoo, lotion, toilet bowl cleaner, alcohol and similar products. Put a childproof lock on the cabinet door. About 20 percent of accidental poisonings occur in the bathroom.
- ___ Remove the door lock so children cannot lock themselves in the bathroom.
- ___ Adjust the water heater to a lower temperature* (120° F) to keep children from scalding themselves while washing their hands, or use scald-prevention devices.
- ___ Check wastebaskets for hazards. Empty old medicines safely and rinse containers before disposing. Put used razor blades in a solid container (made of metal or heavy plastic or cardboard) and place them outside in the garbage.
- ___ Unplug appliances such as shavers and hair dryers when not in use. Place out of children's reach.
- ___ Have ground-fault circuit-interrupters (GFCI) installed at outlets to help prevent electrocution and on any outlets close to water sources or for the whole circuit.
- ___ Place diapering area next to a water source. Use a container with a tight lid for soiled diapers.
- ___ When not being used, place locks on toilet lids to prevent drowning.

Living room or indoor play area

- ___ Remove furniture with sharp corners or that overturns easily or place rubber safety corners on tables to prevent serious injury.
- ___ Push the TV set against the wall so children cannot get to the cord or to the back of the set.
- ___ Move cords from lamps, radios and other electrical appliances so they do not lie where people walk or children can reach.
- ___ Remove all extension cords used as permanent wiring.
- ___ Place lamps, knick-knacks and other breakables out of children's reach. Check for tablecloths that children may pull off and house plants that they may overturn.
- ___ Do not smoke around children. Remove all tobacco products, lighters, matches and smoking accessories. Tobacco is toxic when eaten by a toddler (for example, butts from an ashtray). Research shows that secondhand smoke can increase childhood respiratory illnesses. Do not smoke in a home or building where children are being cared for.
- ___ Install safety gates across stairs. Use sturdy, straight-edge gates. Children can get their necks caught in the expandable type with V-shaped openings at the top.
- ___ Keep stairways free of toys or other objects. Do not use scatter or throw rugs at the top or bottom landing. Make sure railings are strong.
- ___ Do not use infant walkers; they are a leading consumer product in causing injury to children.
- ___ Place a high latch on doors leading to rooms you do not want children to use, or to any outdoor area not protected by a fence. Never block fire exits.
- ___ Install fireplaces and woodstoves in accordance with codes, and use a protective screen to prevent children from getting too close. Do not use portable unvented fuel-fired heating systems.
- ___ Install and maintain carbon monoxide alarms. Test the alarms monthly.
- ___ Install a protective shield over radiators and heater vents if they are too hot.
- ___ Mount electric fans where children cannot reach them. Inspect the protective fan-blade enclosure to be sure children cannot reach the blades.
- ___ If children eat paint that contains lead or dust that has lead in it, they may be poisoned. Consult the health department if you suspect the peeling paint is lead-based and if you have a home or building built prior to 1978. You will need professional help to remove or encapsulate it with a protective layer if the paint is determined to be a hazard. Protect children from poisoning through using lead safe practices. Lead poisoning damage is irreversible and is dangerous to children's health and development. Children under 6 years of age should be tested for lead poisoning. Homes can be tested for lead paint with a dust wipe test sent to a lab. There are other tests as well.
- ___ Repair any loose nails and splinters in wooden floors and loose threads in carpet.
- ___ Remove scatter or throw rugs or use non-skid mats to prevent falls.

- ___ Mark glass doors and low windows with posters, colored tape or decals to prevent children from running into them.

Bedroom or Sleeping Area

- ___ Use cribs or beds with secure sides to keep infants and toddlers from falling or rolling out onto the floor. Make sure a child in the crib cannot reach or easily release the side lock, and that all edges and bolts are smooth.
- ___ Measure crib slats. There should not be more than 2 3/8 inches between slats; a baby's head can become wedged between them. Ensure the crib is not on recall and that no lead-based paint is present. Visit the Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC) Web site for safety and recall information at www.cpsc.gov.
- ___ Make sure crib mattresses fit snugly and securely so the baby's head cannot get caught between them and the crib frame. The American Academy of Pediatrics, National Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, and the CPSC suggest that parents and childcare providers should remove crib bumper pads from baby cribs.
- ___ To prevent suffocation, never put soft pillows, floppy toys or loose-fitting plastic sheeting in cribs and playpens. The CPSC advises parents and caregiver not to use soft bedding in cribs.
- ___ Place infants on their back in the crib.
- ___ Place cribs away from windows unless the windows have guards or sturdy screens.
- ___ Tie up any drawstrings on window treatments and blinds. Ensure blind adjustment cords are out of reach of children.
- ___ Have separate sheets and blankets for each child for naps. Frequently wash the bedding to prevent the spread of illness.
- ___ Place vitamins, medicines, cosmetics, perfume, shoe polish and similar products out of children's reach.
- ___ Keep all plastic bags away from children as they are a suffocation hazard.
- ___ Install smoke alarms near the children's sleeping areas. Install alarms on each floor level. Do a monthly safety check. Ask about local fire codes.
- ___ Plan and implement monthly fire drills with children and staff. Specify an outside meeting place to account for all children. Teach children to "stop, drop and roll" in case of clothing fires.

Toys and learning materials

- ___ Choose toys that are easy to wash and keep clean and are age appropriate. Wash infant and toddler toys daily. Try to give each infant and toddler separate crib toys that another child will not use the same day. Keep a bin handy for soiled toys.
- ___ Choose fabric toys labeled flame-retardant or non-flammable, washable and those that can be sanitized.
- ___ Check stuffed toys to be sure eyes and other parts are secure. Wash fabric-stuffed toys regularly.
- ___ Remove any toys with sharp points or rough edges. Some plastic toys become brittle with age.

- ___ Make sure toys are sturdy so they will not splinter or break with normal use.
- ___ Give infants and toddlers only toys too large to swallow. If you are caring for infants do not use any toys or objects with removable parts that have a diameter of less than 2 inches to 2 1/4 inches in depth.
- ___ Keep plastic bags, tissue and plastic foam objects away from young children.
- ___ Read the labels on crayons, paints, clay and other materials. Check to be sure that they are non-poisonous. Look for the words "non-toxic" and "safe for children," "meets ASTM regulations" or the CP or AP symbols on labeling.
- ___ Store toys and learning materials on low shelves where children can reach them. Place heavy toys near the floor.
- ___ Keep toys used by older children out of reach of younger children.
- ___ Avoid toys with electrical parts unless children are school-age and know how to handle them safely. Check toys with batteries to be sure they have tight lids on battery compartments. Use only UL listed or other approved devices.
- ___ Do not let children play with shooting toys such as BB guns and darts or anything that explodes.

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)

For Nebraska State child care regulations, contact Child Care Licensing, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services at (402) 471-2133.

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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**Higher temperatures are needed for washing dishes and washing some laundry items.*

Earlier version was adapted in part from a child safety check list by Michael P. Vogel, Ed.D. Housing Specialist at Montana State University.

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