



Summer Safety Tips

Summer offers many opportunities for exploration and play in outdoor learning environments. With proper planning, early childhood programs can make sure that children are able to take advantage of these experiences and safely enjoy the summer.

Tips for Safe Outdoor Play

Weather

The [Child Care Weather Watch](#) can help you understand weather forecasts and decide when it is safe for children to be outside. Along with local forecasts, this resource can help staff check the temperature, humidity, and air quality.

Follow these tips to stay up to date on weather conditions:

- Check the [Air Quality Index](#) and subscribe to [EnviroFlash](#). This service from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state or local environmental agencies sends daily emails about local air quality. Poor air quality can negatively affect children with asthma and other special health care needs.



- Check the forecast for the [UV Index Overview](#) to limit exposure to the sun when the index is high.
- Sign up to receive [hourly weather forecasts](#) from the National Weather Service.



National Center on

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Sun Protection

Children need protection from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays whenever they're outdoors. [Shade and sunscreen](#) protect children from sun exposure and can help to reduce the risk of some skin cancers.

Follow these sun safety tips to reduce UV exposure:

- If possible, use play areas that have some shade.
- Protect infants younger than 6 months from direct sunlight by keeping them in a shady spot under a tree, umbrella, or stroller canopy.
- Limit children's sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when UV rays are strongest.
- Encourage families to dress children in cool clothing such as lightweight cotton pants and long-sleeved shirts. A hat will protect their face, ears, and the back of their neck.
- Get written permission from children's parents or guardians to [use sunscreen](#) with an SPF rating of at least 30. Choose a "broad spectrum" sunscreen to screen out both UVB and UVA rays.
- Apply sunscreen at least 30 minutes before going outdoors so the skin can absorb it. Reapply it every two hours if children are outside for more than an hour, and more often if they are playing in water.
- For children older than 6 months, apply sunscreen to all exposed areas, including children's ears if they are wearing a cap instead of a hat.
- For children younger than 6 months, use sunscreen on small areas of the body, such as the face and the backs of the hands, if protective clothing and shade are not available.



Hydration

Toddlers and preschool children cannot regulate their body temperatures well and need more water when the weather is hot. Regularly scheduled water breaks encourage all children to drink during active play, even if they don't feel thirsty. Fluoridated water (bottled or from the faucet) can reduce the risk of tooth decay and is the best drink for young children in between meals. Staff may offer breast milk or formula to infants, since water is not recommended for infants younger than 6 months. Review the recommendations in [Caring for Our Children \(CFOC\) Standard 4.2.0.6](#) for more information.

Water Safety

Water play is a favorite activity for many young children throughout the year. Families may ask about opportunities for children to have outdoor water play during the summer.



[CFOC Standard 6.3.5.3](#) does not recommend portable wading pools because they are hard to keep clean and can promote the spread of diseases. Sprinklers, hoses, or small, individual water basins are safer than wading pools. Always use [active supervision](#) when children play in or around water.

[Drowning](#) is the leading cause of injury death for young children ages 1 to 4. Always stay within arm's reach whenever a child is in or near water. All backyard swimming pools should be surrounded by a four-sided isolation fence, with self-closing and self-latching gates. Fences should prevent children from getting to the water without supervision.

If children use water tables, make sure that staff clean and sanitize the water table and that children use toys safely. All children should wash their hands before and after play. It is best to have an individual basin for children with cuts, scratches, or open sores on their hands.

[Review CFOC Standard 6.2.4.2](#) for more information.

Playground Safety

An age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate, well-maintained playground offers children many opportunities for outdoor learning and physical activity. For more information, see the [U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's Public Playground Safety Handbook](#) and [Resources for Safe Playgrounds](#). To keep children safe, use [active supervision](#) at all times.

Here are some playground safety tips to follow:

- Inspect materials and equipment. Make repairs when needed.
- Check the temperature of metal swings, slides, dark rubber and plastic materials, and especially the surface under and around playground equipment. Ensure that these surfaces will not burn a child's skin.
- Make sure that impact-absorbing surfaces are the proper thickness to protect children from injury.
- Keep fall zones clear. For more information, see [CFOC 6.2.2 Use Zones and Clearance Requirements](#).

Insects and Insect Repellent

Protect children and adults from insect bites by checking for and removing insect nests under slides, in bushes, and in the ground. Near play areas, make sure there is no standing water for mosquitoes to lay their eggs. Check for ticks after outdoor play, and [remove any ticks](#) as soon as possible. To prevent insect bites, programs may consult with their local health department, Health Services Advisory Committee, or a child care health consultant about whether to [use insect repellent](#) on children when local insects are likely to carry diseases. Be sure to get written permission from children's parents or guardians to apply insect repellent, and follow the instructions on the label. Avoid products with more than 30% DEET, and do not apply insect repellent to infants younger than 2 months. See [CFOC Standard 3.4.5.2](#) for more information on using insect repellent.



Helmets

All children older than 1 should wear properly fitted and approved helmets when they ride toys with wheels or use any wheeled equipment. Helmets should be removed as soon as children stop riding wheeled toys or using the equipment. Approved helmets should meet the standards of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). See [CFOC Standard 6.4.2.2](#) for more information about helmets.

More Summer Safety Tips to Share with Families

- When possible, open windows at home from the top and use window guards. Screens will not prevent children from falling out of a window.
- Prevent child heatstroke in cars. Explore tips to [prevent deaths in hot cars](#). It is never safe to leave young children in a car, even with open windows.
- When cooking outside, keep children at least 3 feet away from the grill.
- Always supervise children closely around fireworks. Visit the [CPSC's Fireworks Information Center](#) to learn more.



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1-888-227-5125

health@ecetta.info

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/health>

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