

Program Operations Safety: Facilities Safety (Video 1)

Dipesh Navsaria: Hello. I'm Dr. Dipesh Navsaria. I'll be your host for this episode of Keeping Them Safe. Today's topic is facilities safety.

Child care facilities should be inspected regularly to make sure they meet compliance and codes. Requirements for your programs vary greatly from state to state. Most states, territories, tribes, or local health departments may have different regulations, training requirements, or other procedures in place. It is important to understand and follow your state or local regulations. Caring for young children requires attention to anything that might impact a child's health, safety, and wellness, directly and indirectly. Buildings can contain potentially toxic or hazardous materials such as lead or asbestos. These can impact the health and wellness of children, family, and staff. Children spend a lot of time crawling and placing their hands in their mouths. These behaviors can expose them to harmful substances that adults are not normally exposed to. In addition, children are much more vulnerable from exposure to contaminated materials because their bodies and organ systems are still developing. Disruption of early development could result in permanent damage with lifelong health consequences. Inspection of newly constructed, renovated, remodeled, or altered buildings used for child care should be conducted by a public inspector to ensure compliance with applicable building and fire codes before the building can be made accessible to children.

The facilities should be accessible for children and adults with disabilities, in accordance with section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA. Accessibility includes access to buildings, toilets, sinks, drinking fountains, outdoor play areas, meal and snack areas, and all classroom and therapy areas. All this information can be found in Caring for Our Children, a collection of best practice standards for early care and education programs.

With recent weather-related disasters impacting childcare programs, we have learned that it is also important, after a natural disaster, to properly evaluate facilities to assure they are structurally sound, as well as not emitting contaminants. Where possible, program should remediate any damage and contaminants, and avoid using facilities where children's health could be compromised. It is important to check with your local tribes, territories, states, and jurisdictions to obtain guidance and assure compliance and adherence to applicable building safety codes. These codes and regulations will provide you with information on what is considered habitable for young children. They also provide safety details like space per child, exits, ventilation, evacuation of children with special needs, use of stairs and handrails, integrated pest management, heating and cooling, protective barriers, lighting and temperature, and much more. At the end of this episode, be sure to check out the resources for staff and families on the video landing page.

Before we close, I have two reflective questions for you. What policies and procedures do you have in place to assure facilities are safe and regular inspections are done? How do you ensure that the facility design, space allocation, and maintenance is being addressed appropriately?

Thank you for spending this time with me. We will see you on another episode of Keeping Them Safe. Remember: the more you learn, the safer they are.