



NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Early Childhood Health and Wellness



# Summer Safety Tips for Early Care and Education Programs

The summer months offer many opportunities for exploration and play in outdoor learning environments. With proper planning, early care and education staff can ensure that children are able to take advantage of these experiences and enjoy the summer months safely.

## Tips for Safe Outdoor Play

### Weather

Staff can use the Iowa Department of Public Health's [Child Care Weather Watch](#) resource to help them understand the words used in weather forecast. This resource, along with local forecasts can help staff monitor the temperature, humidity, and air quality. To stay up to date on current conditions:

- Check the [Air Quality Index](http://airnow.gov) at <http://airnow.gov> and subscribe to [EnviroFlash](#). This service from the US Environmental Protection Agency and state or local environmental agencies provides daily emails with information 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](#) to limit exposure to the sun on days when the Index is high.
- Sign up to receive [hourly weather forecasts](#) from the National Weather Service on a computer or mobile phone.



## Sunscreen

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.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), even a few major sunburns can increase the risk of skin cancer later in life.<sup>1</sup> The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following guidelines<sup>2</sup> regarding sun safety and the selection and application of sunscreen:

- If possible, use play areas that provide some shade to help children stay cool.
- Protect infants under 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 10:00 am and 4:00 pm when UV rays are the 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.

- Obtain written permission from children's parents/ guardians to use a sunscreen with a SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 15. Choose a "broad-spectrum" sunscreen to screen out both UVB and UVA rays.
- Apply sunscreen at least 30 minutes before going outdoors so it is absorbed into the skin. It will need to be reapplied every 2 hours if children are outside for more than an hour, and more frequently 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.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016). [Make Summer Safe for Kids](#).

2. American Academy of Pediatrics (2015). [Sun Safety: Information for Parents About Sunburn & Sunscreen](#).



## Hydration

Toddlers and preschool children cannot regulate their body temperatures well and need additional water when the weather is hot. Provide regularly scheduled water breaks to 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 early childhood caries, and is the best drink choice for young children in between meals. Staff may offer additional breast milk or formula to infants as water is not recommended, especially for infants younger than six months of age. [CFOC Standard 4.2.0.6](#)



## Water Safety

Water play is a favorite activity for many young children throughout the year. Families may ask about opportunities for children to engage in outdoor water play during the summer months. CFOC does not recommend the use of portable wading pools as they do not permit adequate control of sanitation and promote transmission of infectious diseases. Sprinklers, hoses, or small individual water basins are safer alternatives than wading pools. Always use [active supervision](#) when children are playing in or around water. [CFOC Standard 6.3.5.3](#)

If water tables are used, ensure that staff clean and sanitize the water table and that toys are used safely. All children should wash their hands before and after play. It is best to provide an individual basin for children with cuts, scratches or open sores on their hands. [CFOC Standard 6.2.4.2](#)





## Playground Safety

An age- and developmentally-appropriate and well-maintained playground offers children many opportunities for outdoor learning and physical activity. For more information, see the Consumer Product Safety Commission Public Playground Safety Handbook and other resources available at the [Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center \(ECKLC\) website](#). To keep children safe, staff use [active supervision](#) strategies at all times.

In addition, they:

- Inspect materials and equipment and ensure that repairs are completed when needed.
- Check the temperature of metal swings, slides, dark rubber and plastic materials, especially surfacing under and around playground equipment to make sure that these surfaces will not burn a child's skin.
- Ensure that impact-absorbing surfaces are the proper depth 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. Make sure there is no standing water near play areas for mosquitoes to lay their eggs. Check for ticks after outdoor play. CDC provides instructions about [Tick Removal](#). To prevent children's 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 when local insects are likely to carry diseases. Be sure to obtain written permission from children's parents/guardians to apply insect repellent and follow the instructions on the label. These products often use different levels of a chemical called DEET. "The AAP recommends that repellents should contain no more than 30% DEET when used on children. Insect repellents also are **not recommended** for children younger than 2 months."<sup>3</sup> Additional information about using insect repellent on children is available at [CFOC Standard 3.4.5.2](#). Adults can find information here about insect repellents that can protect them from tick and mosquito-borne illnesses.

3. American Academy of Pediatrics (2012). [Choosing an Insect Repellent for Your Child](#).



## Helmets

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

## Additional summer safety tips to share with families.

- 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. CDC recommends that families with backyard swimming pools install a four-sided isolation fence, with self-closing and self-latching gates, around the pool. Fences should completely separate the pool from the house and play area to prevent children from accessing the water without supervision.<sup>4</sup>
- 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. Learn about the [Where's baby, Look before you lock](#) campaign. It is **never** safe to leave young children in a car, even with open windows.
- When cooking outside, keep children at least three feet away from the grill.
- Closely supervise children around fireworks at all times. To learn more visit the [Consumer Product Safety Commission's Fireworks Information Center](#).

## Additional Resources

[Caring for Our Children \(CFOC\)](#)

[Active Supervision Toolkit on ECLKC](#)

[Create a Culture of Safety on ECLKC](#)

[Resources for Safe Playgrounds on ECLKC](#)

[Zika Virus](#)

[Preventing Heatstroke](#)

4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016). [Drowning Prevention](#).



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