

Cold Weather Safety

Children are more vulnerable than adults to the effects of cold weather. These tips help Head Start families and staff keep children safe, healthy, and warm in the winter.

Bundle up!

- Children are at greater risk for frostbite than adults. The best way to prevent frostbite is to make sure children dress warmly and don't spend too much time outside in extreme weather.
- Dress children in layers of warm clothing. If the top layer gets wet, they will still have a dry layer underneath.
- Tuck scarves inside coats and jackets to prevent them from becoming strangulation hazards.
- Car seats and winter coats don't mix. Bulky coats can compress in a crash and create a loose car seat harness. Instead, lay the jacket or a blanket over children once you've safely strapped them into their car seat.



Keeping Healthy Outdoors

- There's no set amount of time for children to play outside safely when the weather is cold. Use your best judgment. When the cold becomes unpleasant, it's time to go inside.
- If you are unsure if weather conditions are safe for outdoor play, check the [Child Care Weather Watch Chart](#).
 - Have children come indoors periodically to prevent hypothermia or frostbite. A temperature of 0 degrees Fahrenheit and a wind speed of 15 mph creates a wind chill temperature of -19 F. Under these conditions, frostbite can occur in just 30 minutes.
 - Frost nip is an early warning sign of frostbite. The skin may feel numb or tingly or appear red (on lighter skin).
 - To prevent frostbite, check that mittens and socks are dry and warm. Frostbite occurs mostly on fingers, toes, ears, noses, and cheeks. The affected area becomes very cold, firm, and, depending on the color of the skin, turns white, yellowish-gray, or gray.
 - Even though it's cold outside, it's important to use sunscreen and stay hydrated. Children are more likely than adults to become dehydrated.

Staying Safe Indoors and in Vehicles

- Keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from heating equipment, including furnaces, fireplaces, wood stoves, and portable space heaters.
- Set up a 3-foot "kid-free zone" around open fires and space heaters.
- Remember to turn portable heaters off when leaving the room.
- Test smoke alarms at least once a month.
- Vent all fuel-burning equipment to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.
- Install and maintain CO alarms. Keep alarms at least 15 feet away from fuel-burning appliances.
- If you need to warm up your vehicle, remove it from the garage as soon as you start it to avoid the risk of CO poisoning. Don't leave a vehicle running inside a garage.
- If vehicles are parked outside, check to make sure the tailpipe is not blocked with snow, which can also cause problems with CO.

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Sleeping Safely in Any Season

- Keep babies' cribs free of stuffed animals and blankets. A firm mattress covered with a tight-fitting crib sheet is all that an infant needs to sleep safely.
- If you are worried about keeping babies warm, dress them in a wearable blanket, also known as a sleep sack.



Infection Control

- Cold weather does not cause colds or flu. However, viruses that cause a cold and the flu are more common in the winter when children spend more time indoors.
- Keeping everyone's hands clean is one of the most important ways to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Wash hands with soap and clean running water and rub them together for at least 20 seconds.
- Teach children to cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve or elbow, not their hands. Adults should model this behavior.
- Review program policies on handwashing; cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting; and excluding children and caregivers who are sick.
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that all children 6 months and older receive the seasonal flu vaccine every year. All early care and education program staff should also get vaccinated for the flu.



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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.



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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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Understand the Weather



Wind-Chill

- 30° is **chilly** and generally uncomfortable
- 15° to 30° is **cold**
- 0° to 15° is **very cold**
- 32° to 0° is **bitter cold** with significant risk of **frostbite**
- -20° to -60° is **extreme cold** and **frostbite** is likely
- -60° is **frigid** and exposed **skin will freeze** in 1 minute

Heat Index



- 80° or below is considered **comfortable**
- 90° beginning to feel **uncomfortable**
- 100° **uncomfortable** and may be **hazardous**
- 110° considered **dangerous**

All temperatures are in degrees Fahrenheit

Child Care Weather Watch

Wind-Chill Factor Chart (in Fahrenheit)										
		Wind Speed in mph								
		Calm	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40
Air Temperature	40	40	36	34	32	30	29	28	28	27
	30	30	25	21	19	17	16	15	14	13
	20	20	13	9	6	4	3	1	0	-1
	10	10	-1	-4	-7	-9	-11	-12	-14	-15
	0	0	-11	-16	-19	-22	-24	-26	-27	-29
	-10	-10	-22	-28	-32	-35	-37	-39	-41	-43
	-20	-20	-34	-41	-45	-48	-51	-53	-55	-57
	-30	-30	-46	-53	-58	-61	-64	-67	-69	-71



Comfortable for out door play



Caution




Danger

Heat Index Chart (in Fahrenheit %)														
		Relative Humidity (Percent)												
		40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100
Temperature (F)	80	80	80	81	81	82	82	83	84	84	85	86	86	87
	84	83	84	85	86	88	89	90	92	94	96	98	100	103
	90	91	93	95	97	100	103	106	109	113	117	122	127	132
	94	97	100	102	106	110	114	119	124	129	135			
	100	109	114	118	124	129	136							
	104	119	124	131	137									
110	136													


Child Care Weather Watch

Watching the weather is part of a child care provider's job. Planning for playtime, field trips, or weather safety is part of the daily routine. The changes in weather require the child care provider to monitor the health and safety of children. What clothing, beverages, and protections are appropriate? **Clothe** children to maintain a comfortable body temperature (warmer months - lightweight cotton, colder months - wear layers of clothing). **Beverages** help the body maintain a comfortable temperature. Water or fruit juices are best. Avoid high-sugar content beverages and soda pop. **Sunscreen** may be used year around. Use a sunscreen labeled as SPF-15 or higher. Read and follow all label instructions for the sunscreen product. Look for sunscreen with UVB and UVA ray protection. **Shaded** play areas protect children from the sun.

 Condition **GREEN** - Children may play outdoors and be comfortable. Watch for signs of children becoming uncomfortable while playing. Use precautions regarding clothing, sunscreen, and beverages for all child age groups.

INFANTS AND TODDLERS are unable to tell the child care provider if they are too hot or cold. Children become fussy when uncomfortable. Infants/toddlers will tolerate shorter periods of outdoor play. Dress infants/toddlers in lightweight cotton or cotton-like fabrics during the warmer months. In cooler or cold months dress infants in layers to keep them warm. Protect infants from the sun by limiting the amount of time outdoors and playing in shaded areas. Give beverages when playing outdoors.


YOUNG CHILDREN remind children to stop playing, drink a beverage, and apply more sunscreen. OLDER CHILDREN need a firm approach to wearing proper clothing for the weather (they may want to play without coats, hats or mittens). They may resist applying sunscreen and drinking beverages while outdoors.

 Condition **YELLOW** - use caution and closely observe the children for signs of being too hot or cold while outdoors. Clothing, sunscreen, and beverages are important. Shorten the length of outdoor time.

INFANTS AND TODDLERS use precautions outlined in Condition Green. Clothing, sunscreen, and beverages are important. Shorten the length of time for outdoor play.

YOUNG CHILDREN may insist they are not too hot or cold because they are enjoying playtime. Child care providers need to structure the length of time for outdoor play for the young child.

OLDER CHILDREN need a firm approach to wearing proper clothing for the weather (they may want to play without coats, hats or mittens), applying sunscreen and drinking liquids while playing outdoors.

 Condition **RED** - most children should not play outdoors due to the health risk.

INFANTS/TODDLERS should play indoors and have ample space for large motor play.

YOUNG CHILDREN may ask to play outside and do not understand the potential danger of weather conditions.

OLDER CHILDREN may play outdoors for very short periods of time if they are properly dressed, have plenty of fluids. Child care providers must be vigilant about maximum protection of children.

Understand the Weather

The weather forecast may be confusing unless you know the meaning of the words.

Blizzard Warning: There will be snow and strong winds that produce a blinding snow, deep drifts, and life threatening wind chills. Seek shelter immediately.

Heat Index Warning: How hot it feels to the body when the air temperature (in Fahrenheit) and relative humidity are combined.

Relative Humidity: The percent of moisture in the air.

Temperature: The temperature of the air in degrees Fahrenheit.

Wind: The speed of the wind in miles per hour.

Wind Chill Warning: There will be sub-zero temperatures with moderate to strong winds expected which may cause hypothermia and great danger to people, pets and livestock.

Winter Weather Advisory: Weather conditions may cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous. If caution is exercised, these situations should not become life threatening.

Winter Storm Warning: Severe winter conditions have begun in your area.

Winter Storm Watch: Severe winter conditions, like heavy snow and ice are possible within the next day or two.