



## Emergency Preparedness in Child Care Programs

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**Applicability:** Licensed and Funded Child Care Programs

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### BACKGROUND

The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) is committed to supporting child care programs facing unforeseen emergencies. These emergencies include both natural and man-made disasters that can happen anywhere and at any time, without warning. The emergency planning requirements outlined in this policy help child care programs prepare in advance to keep children and staff as safe as possible during such crises.

### AUTHORITY

- 606 CMR 7.11(7): Emergency Preparedness
- 606 CMR 7.04(4): Record Requirements
- 606 CMR 7.11(6): Use of Off-site Facilities

### DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions are used:

- Local Emergency Management Director: A municipal employee who is responsible for providing information about local hazards, emergency plans, shelters and related topics. The Local Emergency Management Director is typically situated within the local fire department, police department, or other municipal government department.

- The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) maintains a [list of contact information](#) for these local offices across the state.
- **Lockdown:** A safety procedure for when there is a human threat inside or close to the building. A building might be placed on lockdown, for example, if an active shooter enters the building or a violent incident occurs nearby. When a building is placed on lockdown, staff secure themselves and children in a locked room and remain out of sight. Examples of lockdown practices include locking and barricading exterior and interior doors, turning off lights, keeping everyone quiet and out of view, and not allowing anyone to enter or exit the building until it is safe to resume normal activities.
- **Shelter in Place:** A safety procedure for when there is a hazardous outdoor situation, typically a weather emergency or environmental contamination, and it is safer to stay inside. Examples of shelter in place practices include moving everyone indoors quickly, moving children to designated safe interior spaces, securing the building, and following emergency communication procedures until it is safe to resume normal activities.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

### **Emergency Preparedness Plan Content**

Per 606 CMR 7.11(7)(f), child care programs must create and maintain an emergency preparedness plan. This plan must address each of the following topics:

1. **Communication with Authorities:** Describe how, when, and who will contact the fire department and/or other appropriate government authorities to communicate emergency information. Please include a list of these authorities and their contact information (name, type of organization, phone number). Include the unique phone numbers of your local fire and police departments so that you can call them directly, rather than be routed through 9-1-1.
2. **Communication and Reunification with Families:** Explain how the program will communicate with families during an emergency, including:
  - The program's plan for notifying the families of the emergency, including the mode(s) of communication used and the individual(s) responsible for outreach;
  - The program's plan for verifying that the adult picking up a child is on the approved pick-up list; and

- The procedures for when a parent or caregiver is unable to pick up their child during the emergency and/or is unresponsive to the program's outreach efforts.
3. Power, Heat, and Water: Describe how the program will address a sudden loss of power, heat, and/or water. Please include the contact information (name, type of organization, phone number) for:
- The utility companies that service your building(s);
  - The heating/HVAC technicians, electricians, and plumbers that service your building(s); and
  - Any other relevant contacts.
4. Missing Child: Describe the program's procedures for responding to a missing child. The plan must be specific to the program site(s) and take into consideration whether the site is open to the public. Please include the following:
- The steps staff will take if a child is missing;
  - The staff who are responsible for searching for a missing child and which areas they will search first;
  - When the program will notify outside authorities;
  - Which other individuals or groups the program will notify;
  - The impact these missing child procedures will have on the regular routines and activities of the program and how this will be addressed; and
  - The program's procedures for a child who goes missing during an off-site activity, such as a field trip.
5. Shelter in Place: Explain how and where staff and children will shelter in place within the program during occasions such as a severe weather situation. The plan must address the following:
- How the program will obtain information from local authorities to determine whether to shelter in place;
  - How educators will monitor child attendance;
  - How educators will keep the children safe and comfortable while sheltering in place, taking into consideration whether emergency supplies of food, water, blankets, flashlights, diapers, baby formula, clothing and other necessities are available on site;
  - How educators will keep the children engaged during the emergency; and
  - The individual responsible for shutting off the electricity, gas, and water service, if necessary.

6. Lockdown: The program must outline a set of lockdown procedures designed to keep children and staff safe in the event of a potential threat from an intruder inside or near the program. The lockdown plan must address:
- How the program will determine whether to lockdown and the individual responsible for making this decision;
  - The program's lockdown procedures;
  - The procedure for notifying educators about a lockdown, including who is responsible for notifying educators and the mode(s) of communication used;
  - The procedure for notifying local authorities, parents, and guardians about the lockdown;
  - The individual(s) responsible for locking doors and gathering children; and
  - The procedure for monitoring attendance during and after the lockdown.
7. Evacuation: Describe how the program will safely move all children, including children with disabilities and infants, out of the home or building during an emergency. Please include the following information:
- The escape routes from each floor/space approved for child care;
  - The program's plan for monitoring attendance, and making sure that no child is left in the building after evacuation;
  - The program's plan for ensuring they have each child's approved pick-up list;
  - The program's plan for ensuring they will have with them, as required by 606 CMR 7.11(5)(d): a first aid kit; each child's current family contact information; information about allergies and known medical conditions; any emergency or life-saving medications, such as asthma inhalers and epinephrine auto-injectors, for any children for whom they have been prescribed; and authorizations for emergency care for each child.
  - If the program uses cribs for evacuation, a description of the cribs, confirming they are safe, easily movable, and able to fit through exit doors, as required by 606 CMR 7.11(7)(i);
  - A description of how the program will evacuate children with disabilities, including each child's individual health care plan, medications, and equipment; and
  - As required by 606 CMR 7.11(7)(f), the program's plan for contacting the fire department or other outside authorities after evacuating the building.

See additional requirements for Family Child Care (FCC) programs outlined in the [EEC Exits and Evacuations in Family Child Care Programs Policy](#).

8. Relocation: The program must identify two locations where the program can provide temporary child care services during an emergency until parents and children can be reunited. One location must be within walking distance of the program, and the other location must be outside of the program's neighborhood in case of widespread emergency. Please provide the following information:
  - Addresses of the two designated meeting places, plus any other relevant information about the sites;
  - The program's plan for transporting children, including those with disabilities, infants, and staff to each site;
  - The program's plan for monitoring attendance during the relocation process;
  - The program's plan for ensuring they have each child's approved pick-up list; and
  - The program's plan for ensuring they will have with them, as required by 606 CMR 7.11(5)(d): a first aid kit; each child's current family contact information; information about allergies and known medical conditions; any emergency or life-saving medications, such as asthma inhalers and epinephrine auto-injectors, for any children for whom they have been prescribed; and authorizations for emergency care for each child.

See additional requirements for Group and School Age Programs outlined in the [EEC Temporary/Emergency Relocation Policy](#). EEC recommends that programs seek advice from their Local Emergency Management Director when choosing relocation sites.

9. Immediate Continuity of Operations: Detail how program staff will continue to provide child care services if they are unable to use the program's building.
10. Staff Training and Practice Drills: Provide the program's plan for training its staff on its emergency preparedness plan. Additionally, detail the program's procedures for conducting practice drills. Include information on how the program will take attendance during a drill and keep a log of practice drills.

## **Emergency Preparedness Plan Training**

Child care programs must train their staff on the emergency preparedness plan they submit to EEC. Programs must train any new staff members before they begin working with children and retrain all staff on at least an annual basis.

Child care programs must log all staff training dates and provide the log to EEC staff when requested.

In Family Child Care programs where the educator operates alone and without assistant staff, the educator must review their emergency plan at least once annually, determine if changes are needed, and verbally attest to this review with their EEC licensor during licensing visits.

## **Practice Drills**

Per 606 CMR 7.11(7)(h), programs must hold evacuation practice drills with all groups of children and educators from each floor level of the approved child care space at least monthly. They must hold evacuation practice drills during different times of the day and use alternative exits.

Programs must use that day's attendance record to check child and staff attendance during an evacuation practice drill, when gathered in a safe space post-evacuation, and upon return to the program.

Per 606 CMR 7.04(4), programs must document all evacuation practice drills, including the date, time, exit route used, number of children evacuated, and the success of the drill (e.g., how long it took to evacuate all children, any lessons learned to improve future drills, etc.). The program must retain the above log in a secure location and provide it to EEC staff upon request.

EEC encourages programs to also hold shelter in place and lockdown practice drills. EEC also recommends that programs inform parents/guardians prior to holding any practice drill with their children.

## Posting and Notification

All programs must:

- Post their emergency preparedness plan in plain view next to the program's EEC child care license;
- Provide copies of the emergency preparedness plan to all staff; and
- Share the emergency preparedness plan with parents/guardians prior to child enrollment.

Programs must also notify all staff and parents/guardians of anticipated changes to their emergency preparedness plan at least two weeks prior to submitting the updated plan to EEC.

## Submission to EEC

Programs must submit an up-to-date emergency preparedness plan to EEC:

- Prior to initial licensure;
- At the time of license renewal; and
- Prior to any structural changes to the property(ies) or building(s) where the program operates, including, but not limited to, the physical layout or location.

Per 606 CMR 7.11(7)(g), programs must keep their emergency preparedness plan current and ensure it meets the needs of all children in care, including infants, toddlers, and any children who may need additional assistance during an evacuation.

Programs will submit their emergency preparedness plan and updates through LEAD, EEC's online portal for all licensing functions.

## SUGGESTED GUIDANCE

EEC recommends that programs consult and coordinate with their Local Emergency Management Director as they create their emergency preparedness plan. The contact information may be found on the website of the program's municipal (city or town) government or the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) [website](#).

Programs can also refer to the [EEC Essentials 2.0 Training](#) on Emergency Response and Missing Child Prevention as they create their emergency preparedness plan.

## COMPLIANCE

EEC staff may measure compliance by reviewing the following child care program documentation:

- Emergency preparedness plan;
- Practice drill log; and
- Emergency preparedness training log.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For additional information on creating emergency plans, or for examples of such plans, please see:

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC): [Children In Disasters: Teachers and Early Care and Education Programs \(2023\)](#)
- Child Care Aware:
  - [Child Care Program Emergency Drill Log](#)
  - [Preparing to Evacuate or Shelter-in-Place](#)
- Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA):
  - [Find your local Emergency Management Director \(EMD\)](#)
  - [Plans and Planning Guidance](#)
- Massachusetts Office of Preparedness and Emergency Management: [Emergency preparedness materials](#)
  - [Emergency Planning Tool](#)
  - [Emergency Supply Kit Checklist](#)
- U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF):
  - [Child Care Resources for Disasters and Emergencies \(2021\)](#)
  - [Resource Guide: Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Resources for Child Care Programs](#)
- U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): [Youth and Emergency Planning \(2025\)](#)
- U.S. Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response (OHSEPR): [Early Childhood Disaster-Related Resources for Early Childhood Education Providers \(2024\)](#)

## OBSOLETE

- [EEC Policy: Emergency Contingency Plans \(2014\)](#)
- [EEC Policy: Emergency Contingency Plans for Funded Programs \(2019\)](#)