



**Department of
Early Education and Care**
THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

Child Care Licensing

POLICY STATEMENT: Emergency Contingency Plans

Child care licensing regulations require that programs develop written plans detailing procedures for meeting potential emergencies, including but not limited to, missing children, fire, natural disasters, potential threats to the safety of the children and staff from internal or external sources, and loss of power, heat or water. [See 606 CMR 7.11(7)(f)] Some emergencies may require evacuation of the child care site. In other situations it may be best to take shelter within the facility or lockdown the facility until the emergency is resolved. Some situations may involve only the child care facility itself; others may include the neighborhood or immediate area. When dealing with a natural disaster, program administrators should contact local authorities and/or listen to radio/television or check the internet to determine whether to evacuate or shelter in place. No matter what the circumstances, planning ahead and practice will help children and adults remain as safe as possible when an emergency occurs. Practice evacuation drills must be held monthly under a variety of circumstances. [See 7.11(7)(h).]

Evacuation

In the event of a **fire, natural disaster, or other situation requiring evacuation of the building** (such as a chemical spill or bomb threat), the plan must specify:

- escape routes from each floor/area of the child care home or facility;
- a designated meeting place outside of the child care home or facility;
- a method of contacting the fire department or other appropriate authorities after the home or facility has been evacuated;
- where the children will be taken if it is necessary to leave the premises;
- how children will be transported to the alternate location;
- how the program will ensure that all children are accounted for before and after leaving the program site and after arriving at the temporary location;
- how the program will meet children's needs for medication, food, first aid and activities in the temporary location; and
- how parents will be notified of the children's location.

You must consider whether the program will have its own vehicle(s) available to transport the children to an emergency location, or whether you will need assistance from emergency vehicles.

Providers should consider the resources for shelter available in the neighborhood, seek permission (in advance) from proper authorities, and make sure there is a safe, comfortable space for the children there. In addition, programs should identify another location further away, outside of the neighborhood, in the event that the emergency is more widespread. If you must evacuate the facility, you must be prepared to take with you emergency contact information for all children, emergency medical treatment consent forms, special medications needed by the children, and first aid supplies. You may want to have a “disaster kit” prepared that you can quickly retrieve and take with you containing all the necessary information, and several others with toys and activity plans to engage the children. As in any off-site activity, count the children before you leave the program, count them again once outside, count them again once on the transportation vehicle, and count them when you get to your destination. Since regulations require that you have a working telephone available, determine whether a telephone will be available at your destination for your use in notifying parents, or whether you will bring a cellular telephone. [See 7.11(7)(c).] Remember to notify EEC immediately about any emergency relocation. [See 7.04(15)(h).] Document when the children are picked up from the temporary location and by whom. In addition, find out from emergency personnel in your town where the local meeting place is in the event of a major evacuation that includes an entire town, city or geographic area.

Sheltering in Place

In some emergency situations it may be safer to remain on site until the emergency has ended. In the event of severe weather or other emergencies creating a **power outage, loss of heat or water, if the program will continue to operate on site** the plan must address the following:

- How will the program meet the need for heat, telephone service, fire and smoke detection alarms, lighting, hot and cold water, and the preparation and storage of food during the emergency?
- How will the program meet the requirements for toileting, flushing toilets, diapering, hand washing, and dish washing, if necessary?
- How will educators keep the children safe and comfortable while sheltering in place? Consider whether emergency supplies of food, water, blankets, flashlights, diapers, baby formula, clothing and other necessities are available on site.
- How will educators keep the children engaged during the emergency? You may want to set aside special activities for the children until the situation resolves.
- Is it necessary to move to an interior area of the building, away from windows, such as a basement, interior room or hallway (in the event of a tornado, for example)?
- Who will be responsible for shutting off electricity, gas and water service, if necessary? It is best to contact your local building inspector, board of health, fire department or other emergency agency for their advice regarding any of the above emergencies.

In the event of a potential threat from an intruder inside or outside the program, your response will depend on a number of factors, including the size and type of construction of your facility, the number of classrooms, the number and ages of children in the program, the proximity of children to exterior exits, and the degree to which the intruder is armed. You must

develop facility-specific “**lock-down**” procedures designed to keep children and staff safe within the facility until police or other emergency responders can respond and eliminate the threat. In a facility with multiple classrooms, such as a school,¹ “lock-down” typically involves gathering all the children in their classrooms, closing and locking² all interior doors, and covering interior classroom windows. Lights in each classroom should be turned off, and children should be asked to sit on the floor and remain quiet, out of sight lines from the door. A cellular telephone, land-line or other means of communicating within and outside of the facility must be available at all times. If there is a more secure space that can be locked within or near the classroom, such as a closet, bathroom or other area without windows, it may be best to gather children there. In a program with a single classroom or in a home setting, a closet or bathroom space may be the best available option. However, in certain situations (depending on the proximity of the threat, the number of staff available and the possibility of escape), it may be best for some or all of the occupants to flee the building when an intruder enters. In either case, advance planning is necessary. Your plan must address:

- who is responsible for calling for lock-down or evacuation;
- how program staff will be notified when a lock-down is necessary, and when it has ended;
- where in the facility will children be gathered;
- who is responsible for locking doors, gathering children (depending on their location within the facility) or leading children from the facility; and
- who is responsible for notifying police and other emergency officials, as well as parents and others who may need to be notified.
- how the program will ensure that all children are accounted for before, during and after the emergency;
- how the program will ensure access to sufficient supplies (food, water, necessary medications, first aid supplies, diapers, infant formula) to meet the children’s immediate needs if the emergency extends for more than a few minutes.

Missing Child

Programs must include in their plans procedures for responding to a missing child. Such procedures should identify which staff will be responsible for searching for a missing child; which areas of the facility or the outdoor area will be searched first; at what point will outside authorities be notified, and who must be notified, and by whom; and what impact such an occurrence will have on the regular routines and activities of the program, including activities and children in other classrooms or areas of the building. Plans must be specific to the individual program site, and must take into consideration whether the facility is open to the public and may include individuals other than parents and program employees. In addition, the plan must include procedures to address missing children during off-site activities, such as field trips.

¹ Programs located in public school buildings should contact school administrators to determine whether a “lock-down” procedure is in place for the school, and shall consider implementing the school’s existing plan, as appropriate.

² Programs should consult with their local building inspectors before installing any additional interior locks, such as deadbolts.

EEC regulations require that programs share their procedures for meeting potential emergencies (emergency contingency plans) with parents prior to enrollment [*see* 606 CMR 7.08(6)(d)], and review and update their plans regularly [*see* 606 CMR 7.11(7)(g)]. Plans must be sufficient to meet the needs of all children in care, regardless of age or disability. In preparing your emergency contingency plan EEC strongly recommends that programs contact emergency management personnel in their city or town to obtain current information on the specifics of the emergency evacuation and disaster plans in place for that specific location. A list of local emergency management directors and guidance in developing an emergency preparedness plan can be found at <http://www.mass.gov/mema>.