



Department of Early Education and Care

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

Family Child Care Licensing

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: Protecting Children from Extreme Weather

[See 606 CMR 7.06(1)(b)4 & 5 and 7.11(11)(c)]

EEC regulations for family child care homes require that children have daily outdoor play, weather permitting. While an opportunity for fresh air and outdoor play is important for children and caregivers alike, there are some precautions that must be taken to protect children from extreme weather.

Protection from Cold

In cold weather, children should wear several layers of loose-fitting, warm clothing. Caregivers should check young children's hands and feet at least every 15 minutes when they are outdoors in cold weather to be sure they are warm and maintain their usual color. Children should wear a hat, scarf or knit mask to cover the face and mouth, sleeves that are snug at the wrist, mittens, and a water-resistant coat and shoes. Their clothing must be kept dry. The outer layer of clothing should be tightly woven and wind resistant, to reduce body heat loss caused by wind. Children should not play outdoors in cold weather if they do not have appropriate clothing.

In extremely cold weather, and especially if there are high winds, children should play indoors. Trips outside should be kept very brief. Any combination of wind and cold that results in a wind chill at or below 15° Fahrenheit poses a significant health risk. Providers may wish to refer to daily local weather reports to be informed about wind chill factors.

Protection from Heat

Extreme heat can be as hazardous to children as extreme cold. When playing outdoors in warm weather children should wear lightweight cotton clothing. Drinking cool beverages, especially those with low sugar content (like water) also helps the body to maintain a comfortable temperature. The Heat Index is an indication of how the temperature "feels", and is a combination of actual heat and relative humidity. A heat index of 80° Fahrenheit or below is considered comfortable, and safe for children to play outdoors. A heat index between 80° F and 90° F means that children should be closely observed while outdoors, and outdoor play time should be limited. When the heat index

is above 90° F, young children should not play outdoors, and older children should only play outdoors for very short periods of time. Again, local weather reports are a valuable resource for obtaining heat index information.

Protection from Sun

Infants should be kept out of the sun as much as possible during the first year of life. Cover the baby's supersensitive skin with a sun hat, long-sleeved shirt and long pants. Use a carriage with a hood, or a stroller with a canopy to protect the child from the sun. With written parental consent, a small amount of waterproof, moisturizing (not alcohol-based) sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher can be used on exposed areas like an infant's face and the backs of the hands. Beware of surfaces that reflect the sun, such as sand, snow, concrete and water. Cover up on cloudy or hazy days, when the sun's rays can be just as strong as on sunny days.

Older children should be encouraged to play in the shade during the peak sunlight hours between 10:00 a.m. and 4 p.m. Planting trees around outdoor play areas, or using umbrellas, cabanas or other man-made devices will create a shady play space. Children should use a sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher that blocks both UVB and UVA rays whenever they play outdoors, and sunscreen should be reapplied at least every two hours. Wide-brimmed hats and shirts will help to protect them, and time in the sun should be limited. According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, no tan is a healthy tan! A tan is a sign of injured skin from the sun's damaging rays, even if the child did not burn first. Caregivers should check the UV index in the newspaper or during the weather report each day to find the strength of the sun, and modify outdoor activities and playtimes accordingly.

Protection from Poor Air Quality

Sometimes weather conditions result in poor air quality (smog) that can pose significant health risks to children with respiratory problems, such as asthma. Local health authorities or the National Weather Service will issue ozone or smog alerts when the air quality is approaching unhealthy levels. At these times, children with respiratory health problems should not be allowed to play outdoors.

For more information on any of these issues, contact the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Family and Community Health; or the Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov.