

Child Care Worker Safety Fact Sheet

HS22-004A (11-22)

Child care workers are exposed to many health and safety risks as they provide care and education to infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children. Infectious diseases, musculoskeletal injuries, tripping accidents, and occupational stress are daily workplace challenges for these employees. A focus on safety and regular employee training can reduce these risks and help keep workers and the young ones they care for happier, healthier, and injury-free.



Ergonomics

Ergonomics means designing a job to fit the employee, so the work is safer and more efficient. Using good ergonomics can reduce the risk of strains and sprains among child care workers.

Child care work can take a toll on the muscles, joints, and ligaments in the back, neck, and shoulders. Factors that contribute to these injuries include:

Bending at the knees and keeping the back straight can reduce back injuries while performing child care tasks. For example:

- Allow children to use a step stool to reach the sink or water fountain, instead of lifting them.
- When comforting children, kneel to their level instead of bending over them or lifting them.
- Avoid bending or hunching when cleaning, sitting at low tables, or setting up cots.

Contributing Factor	Common Child Care Job Duties
Heavy lifting	Food preparation; lifting children
Pushing or applying force	Pushing large strollers
Frequent bending and twisting	Picking up children
Awkward standing and posture	Sitting on the ground or in kids' chairs
Sudden load bearing	Reaching for a falling object or child
Repetitive work	Arts and crafts; changing diapers

Employers can help protect child care workers' backs with these steps:

- Train employees to lift properly when bending cannot be avoided: get as close to the object as possible, use the entire hand to grip the load, bend the knees, tighten the stomach muscles, and let the legs support the body while gradually lifting.
- Encourage employees to lift a child only when necessary.
- Purchase changing tables with built-in steps so children can climb up to the changing area.
- Choose smaller trash bags to prevent employees from lifting heavy loads.



Infection Control

It is no surprise that kids share a lot of germs. These steps can reduce the chances of infectious diseases spreading through a child care facility.

Infection prevention

Thousands of children under 5 years old are hospitalized each year because of infectious diseases.^{1,2,3} These steps can reduce the respiratory and gastrointestinal infections that spread quickly in child care facilities:

- Encourage child care workers to stay up-to-date on immunizations including [routine and seasonal vaccinations](#).
- Educate families on how to monitor their children for signs of sickness and when to keep them home when sick.

Slips, Trips, and Falls

Working around small furniture, toys, and children increases the risk of slips, trips, and falls. These steps can help child care workers prevent these injuries:

- Wear sturdy, comfortable shoes with good traction.
- Walk slowly and avoid rushing while carrying children or other loads that can obstruct the view.
- Pick up scattered toys on the floor between activities.
- Ensure spills are cleaned immediately.
- Secure all rugs.

Hand hygiene

Keeping child care workers' hands clean is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of infection. Ensure the following disease-prevention steps are followed:

- Wear latex or nitrile gloves when changing diapers, helping children use the toilet, wiping noses, brushing teeth, giving health exams, and administering first aid.
- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after caring for each child, changing diapers, helping children in the bathroom,

preparing food, eating, and leaving for the day.

- Ensure there are enough sinks or sanitizer stations throughout the facility and close to diaper changing areas.
- Provide separate sinks for toileting and food preparation.

Cleaning and disinfection

Clean and disinfect touched surfaces often. Schedule when each item is cleaned. Use an [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)-registered disinfectant](#) or a bleach solution. Certain items need additional attention:

- Wash down tables, counters, and sinks often with a solution of one part bleach to 10 parts water.
- Wear smocks or aprons to reduce the spread of germs, especially with infant care.
- Ensure diaper changing areas have paper liners. Use a new liner with each diaper change. Disinfect the changing area between each use.
- When age-appropriate, teach children to dispose of their waste to reduce hazards for other children and child care staff. This includes facial tissues, band-aids, eating utensils, and dirty towels.

Food safety

A large part of a child's day involves eating. Ensure proper food handling and preparation occurs to avoid foodborne illnesses.

- Never prepare food and beverages in playrooms, bathrooms, or diaper-changing areas.
- Wear latex or nitrile gloves when preparing, cooking, or serving food.

- Sanitize reusable utensils and plates between uses.
- Store food, including breast milk, at [safe temperatures](#).
- Label and date leftover food before storing properly.

Occupational Stress

Stress is a part of life and is found all around us. Child care is no exception. Both children and adults need to learn to manage stress effectively. Here are some ways to cope:

- Get enough sleep and develop a regular sleeping pattern.
- Eat healthy meals and get physical activity each day.
- Find quiet time to relax each day.
- Take one thing at a time.
- Take mini breaks when possible.
- Learn to communicate openly with others.



Lice

Lice are highly contagious and common in child care facilities. The tiny insects are transmitted through skin-to-skin contact or by sharing combs, brushes, towels, hats, helmets, and bedding. Avoid sharing personal items.

Lice are not dangerous and do not carry disease. However, they infest the skin, especially the scalp, and can cause extreme itchiness and rashes.

Treatment requires special shampoos and fine combing of the hair to remove lice and their nits (eggs). Wash contaminated items with warm soapy water before reusing them to prevent further spread.

Outdoor Safety

Child care workers should model safe behavior and ensure that the outdoor setting is safe for both children and adults. The [Extension Alliance for Better Child Care](#) offers basic tips to keep young children safe outdoors.

When supervising children in outdoor play areas, child care workers often forget to practice the following sun safety:

- Wear a hat and sunscreen to protect against harmful UV rays.
- Supervise the children from under a covered or shaded play area.
- Wear several light layers of clothing and watch for symptoms of environmental stress or heat stress.

HEAD LICE
RISK FACTORS, SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT

LIFE CYCLE

RISK FACTORS

- TOUCHING INFECTED HEAD
- SHARING PERSONAL ITEMS

SYMPTOMS

- SORES AND SCABS
- SCALP ITCHINESS

TREATMENT

- SYNTHETIC PESTICIDES
- WASH CLOTHES & BEDDING
- SEAL CLOTHES, BEDDING, & PLUSH TOYS IN PLASTIC FOR TWO WEEKS
- SOAK HAIR BRUSHES

For more information on providing a more safe child care setting, review all local and [state regulations](#) and visit the following website:

- [Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards- Guidelines for Early Care and Educational Programs](#) developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, National Resource Center, and American Public Health Association.

Also, download these free publications from the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC)-Workplace Safety:

- [Back Injury Prevention Fact Sheet](#)
- [Ergonomics, A 5-Minute Safety Training Aid](#)

DWC Safety Training Specialists are also available to provide customized small business training by contacting **1-800-252-7031, option 2** or safetytraining@tdi.texas.gov.

References

- ¹ National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, "Influenza and Children." Website. <https://www.nfid.org/infectious-diseases/influenza-and-children/#:~:text=It%20is%20estimated%20that%20an,who%20have%20no%20underlying%20illnesses>. Accessed November 21, 2022.
- ² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report." March 18, 2022/71 (11): 429-436. Website. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7111e2.htm>. Accessed November 21, 2022.
- ³ American Academy of Pediatrics. "14 Diseases You Almost Forgot About Thanks to Vaccines." Website. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Vaccination-Protects-Against-These-Diseases.aspx>. Accessed November 21, 2022.



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1-800-252-7031, Option 2

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