

Health and safety in providing childcare, playgroup and nursery facilities

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Some dangers which are not significant for adults may put a child at serious risk. As a result, children need to be supervised at all times. The following list highlights some simple measures that can be taken to prevent or control the risks that are likely to arise where children are being looked after. The list is not complete, but will serve as a useful starting point for you when assessing the risks in your own premises.

Main dangers

Slips and trips

These are the main causes of injuries. Don't forget about outside, broken and uneven paths can cause accidents too.

Managing the risk

- Fit non-slip floor coverings in areas which are likely to get wet (for example, wet play areas) or where there are likely to be spillages (for example, kitchens).
- Make sure spillages are cleaned up straight away.
- Provide enough storage space for all items, including toys, and tidy everything away after it has been used.
- Avoid trailing cables.
- Keep floor coverings in good condition.

Falls

Falling from heights can be very serious, so a high level of control is needed.

- Keep stairways free of toys and other obstacles which could cause trips.
- Install stair gates.
- Make sure all areas are well lit.
- Provide suitable equipment for reaching high shelves or working at heights.
- Move furniture and other items that could be climbed on away from windows.
- Restrict how far windows can open to prevent children falling out, especially from windows above ground level.
- Provide soft surfaces around play equipment where children could fall.

Moving objects

Consider how someone might be hit by a moving object. For example, could the TV topple over?

- Store items so that they are not likely to fall or injure someone.
- Put vision panels into doors so that children on the other side can be seen and will not be hit by opening doors.
- Fit devices to doors to prevent children's fingers being trapped when doors are closed.

Harmful substances

Many substances, including hot water, paints, toiletries and some plants, can be harmful.

- Keep cleaning chemicals in their original containers and out of the reach of children, preferably in a locked cupboard.
- Train staff in using and storing dangerous substances safely.
- Make sure you do not have plants or trees, such as laburnum and holly, whose seeds and berries could cause sickness or even kill.
- Thermostatic mixing valves can be fitted to keep the temperature of hot water taps below 43°C.
- Keep children out of kitchens.

You may also need to consider the risks of being exposed to bacteria and viruses. Nurseries and playgroups have been the source of significant outbreaks of E. coli O157, a potentially life-threatening infection.

- Develop a formal policy for excluding children and, where appropriate, staff, who are known, or suspected to be suffering from an infectious illness.
- Provide suitable toilet and hand-washing facilities which are appropriate for the children's ages and capabilities.
- Encourage high standards of personal hygiene among staff and children.

- Keep your premises in a hygienic condition by regularly cleaning and disinfecting. You should develop a cleaning schedule.
- Develop procedures for dealing with possible contamination, for example, blood from accidents.
- Follow Health and Safety Executive guidance for visits to open farms. (See below for more information)

Collisions with fixed objects

Toddlers are unsteady on their feet and easily fall over. Older children are also at risk, especially if they are running.

- Position low furniture where children are least likely to run or walk into it and avoid furniture with sharp edges.
- Make sure there is enough space especially around furniture to reduce the risk of knocks and bumps.
- Make sure that glass in doors, windows and furniture is made of safety materials or protected from breaking.
- Make large areas of glazing, such as patio doors, clear by marking them with a sticker if there is a danger of people walking or running into them.
- Provide effective guards for radiators and fires to prevent burns.

Handling

Staff may injure their backs while lifting or carrying children. Pay particular attention to young or pregnant employees.

- As far as possible, avoid lifting heavy objects and do not lift anything which involves reaching too high or too low.
- Train staff in safe lifting techniques.
- Keep sharp objects, including scissors, out of reach of younger children.

Fire

Liquid Petroleum Gas used for cooking and heating can cause fires.

- Keep gas and electrical appliances in good condition.
- Provide and maintain appropriate means of detecting fires (for example, smoke detectors).
- Keep fire escape routes clear.
- Develop an emergency escape plan and practise fire drills regularly.

Drowning

Children can drown in a few inches of water.

- Those most at risk are the under-fives.
- Supervise wet play areas.
- Empty paddling pools after use.
- Cover ponds and water barrels.

Choking

Children cannot resist putting things in their mouths, so be particularly wary of things that might cause choking.

- Check that toys are suitable for the child's age.
- Throw away broken toys.
- Supervise young children when they are playing.
- Avoid using very small objects, such as paper tacks, when young children are around.

Electricity

Young children are not aware of the dangers of electricity.

- Make sure electrical equipment is maintained, examined and tested regularly by a trained person.
- Fit childproof covers to electrical sockets.
- Install a Residual Current Device in the electrical system.

Being exposed to the sun

Children's skin is delicate and very easily damaged by the sun.

- Provide shaded areas in the playground.
- Keep babies under six months out of direct sunlight and restrict times when older children are exposed to the sun (they should avoid it between 11am and 3pm).
- Make sure children playing outside are covered up with suitable clothing, including sun hats.
- Encourage parents to provide sunscreen (at least factor 15).

For more information: