

Use of Infant Carriers or Front Carrying Packs

Some infant caregivers choose to use infant carriers or front packs to soothe fussy or colicky infants. The baby is soothed by the rhythm of the caregiver's walking and the closeness it provides in human contact. However, keep in mind the following considerations when using infant carriers in child care centers:

- ◆ Make sure the infant's head does not slump from inadequate support
- ◆ Ensure there is a clear area around the infant's face for adequate breathing
- ◆ If infants fall asleep in the carrier, they should be removed immediately and placed on their backs in their crib
- ◆ The staff person should not diaper or feed another child while carrying an infant in a front pack
- ◆ Ensure that the carrying device is safe and has not been recalled for safety issues
- ◆ Have each parent who wants their child to use a carrier bring one for their own child (to prevent contamination from one infant to another)
- ◆ Limit the amount of time the infant is in the carrier to ensure they get adequate tummy time, and
- ◆ Make sure it is a choice for infant caregivers to use an infant carrier (they may not want to bear extra weight due to a possible back injury).

It is very rewarding to watch young children grow and develop, knowing that you are helping to lay the groundwork for who they are becoming and what they will be in later years. Providing children with warm and caring interactions and stimulating activities within a safe and healthy environment promotes their future success.

WAC

WAC 170-295-2130

Do I need an outdoor play area?

- You must provide an outdoor program that promotes the child's coordination, active play, and physical, mental, emotional, and social development based upon their age. The play area must:
 - Adjoin the indoor premises directly or be reachable by a safe route or method
 - Have adequate drainage and be free from health and safety hazards
 - Contain a minimum of 75 usable square feet per child using the play area at any one time. If the center uses a rotational schedule of outdoor play periods so that only a portion of the child population uses the play area at one time, you may reduce correspondingly the children's play area size.
- If you provide full-time care, the activity schedule must provide the child daily morning and afternoon outdoor play.
- If you provide drop-in care only, at DEL's discretion they may approve equivalent, separate, indoor space for the child's large muscle play.
- You must ensure appropriate child grouping by developmental or age levels, staff-to-child ratio adherence, and maintain group size.
- Staff must be outdoors with the children in continuous visual and auditory range.
- You must provide a variety of age-appropriate play equipment for climbing, pulling, pushing, riding and balancing activities, and
- You must arrange, design, construct, and maintain equipment and ground cover to prevent child injury.

WAC

You can help ensure healthy physical development when you offer children opportunities to use their large and small muscles in a wide variety of developmentally appropriate ways. Even in the coldest of climates, children need to go outdoors every day for at least a few minutes. Fresh air is vital to children's health. Have the children spend as much time as

they can outdoors. Meals and snacks always taste better on picnics. Read a story on a blanket under a tree. Think of every activity you do inside as a potential outdoor activity, including puzzles, blocks, paints, water play, and dress-up clothes. Never restrict yourself to just recess or typical playground equipment outdoors.

The older the child, the more outdoor time is required. Infants may need only a few brief forays out into the sunshine. Outdoor play for infants includes riding in a carriage or stroller; however, infants should also be offered opportunities for gross motor play outdoors [AAP, 2002]. Toddlers and young preschoolers should spend at least 15 minutes playing outside in the morning and afternoon. School-age children need longer periods of outdoor playtime, especially after a full day of school.

Cold, mud, and puddles are not excuses to keep children indoors. Let your parents know that it is important to send their children to the center with suitable outdoor gear. Explain the importance of outside play to parents who often request that you keep their child inside. There may be inclement weather during your normal outside playtime. Keep your schedule flexible. You may be able to get the children outside briefly later, when there is a break in the weather.

The National Weather Service identifies weather that poses a significant health risk as wind chill at or below 15°F and heat index at or above 90°F. Air quality conditions that pose a significant health risk are identified by announcements from local health authorities or through ozone (smog) alerts. Such air quality conditions require that children remain indoors where air conditioners ventilate indoor air to the outdoors. Children with asthma or other respiratory health problems should not play outdoors when local health authorities announce that the air quality is approaching unhealthy levels [AAP, 2002].

If bad weather or poor air quality prevents children from going outside for active large muscle activities, you may need to temporarily convert some indoor space to accommodate large motor play. You could:

- ♦ Organize indoor group circle games, music, or dance activities that let children actively move around
- ♦ Allow use of some outdoor equipment like wheeled toys in a wide hallway or open room temporarily (make sure you have proper “traffic control”)
- ♦ Make room for portable equipment like balance beams and tumbling mats. If you have indoor slides and climbers they should have approved protection mats under them. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all indoor climbing equipment be surrounded by shock absorbing material conforming to CPSC and ASTM standards (nap time mats, tumbling mats, and carpets do not protect children from head injuries).

Outdoor play area

There are four general components to a good outdoor play space; the space itself, supervision, injury protection and prevention, and site maintenance.

The Outdoor Space

You must have at least 75 square feet per child for the maximum number of children using the outdoor play space at any one time. Centers with limited space may stagger the schedule of children using the space at one time to accommodate this requirement.

The space should be organized in an age appropriate manner with different play areas for different age groups. For centers with multiple groups and different ages in care, schedule outdoor play so that different age groups play in different parts of the play area. This is particularly important for toddlers. They will attempt to play with toys and structures that require more agility and mobility than they have, particularly if there are older children around.

Examine every outdoor toy or structure with children in mind. Children are very inventive and will often use toys in a manner not planned by the manufacturer.

Include a variety of surfaces in your outdoor play area including soil, sand, grass, hills, flat sections, and hard areas for wheel toys. Also include shade, open space, digging space, and a variety of equipment for riding, climbing, and balancing.

When hills and shade are not available, the environment can be supplemented with materials such as awnings, inclines, or ramps.

Be sure to provide private areas outdoors for children to have solitude. Children who spend long periods of time in group settings need opportunities for privacy. Privacy can be provided by using equipment such as tunnels and playhouses. Make sure that these areas can be easily supervised by staff.

The outdoor play area itself should be safe from environmental hazards. It should be well drained with no standing water. You should check the area daily and clean up any debris. Ensure there are several trash containers available outdoors and that they are emptied daily. The area needs to be enclosed to protect children from traffic, unsupervised animals, and unauthorized people. Fences are addressed specifically in WAC 170-295-5100.

Common hazards for children in play areas include:

- ♦ Entrapments (there should be no openings between 3 ½ and 9 inches in size where a child's head or body could get trapped)
- ♦ Entanglements (discourage drawstrings, ties or cords which hang from children's clothing that could get caught on equipment)
- ♦ Exposed sharp objects (nails, bolts, slivers, or wires should not protrude where they might poke a child)
- ♦ Tripping hazards (filler pipes, posts, cover plates, stumps, or rocks must not protrude from the ground, where children might trip or fall on them)
- ♦ Fencing (make sure it is secure, stable, and tall enough to form an age appropriate enclosure)
- ♦ Gates (need to be self-latching or have appropriate locks)
- ♦ Poisonous plants and/or berries (a list is available from your local poison control center)
- ♦ Lighting (sufficient outdoor lighting is required

when the play area is used at dusk)

- ♦ Shade (provide places where children can escape the sun's heat and ultraviolet rays)
- ♦ Slides (make sure there are no breaks or exposed sharp edges on the sliding surface or gaps between the platform and the slide where clothing can get caught)
- ♦ Guardrails (the space between guardrails should be less than 3 ½ inches or more than 9 inches so that children cannot become entrapped)
- ♦ Tire swings (make sure the tire has holes drilled in the bottom to prevent water from collecting and the swing does not hit the side posts as children use it)
- ♦ Tricycles and other wheeled toys (ensure pedals and handles have covers and teach children to wear helmets when they ride on wheeled toys)
- ♦ Merry-go-rounds (these are dangerous and not age-appropriate for preschool age and younger children), and
- ♦ Swings (use only soft swing seats). Swings generally require more space than is available in many child care center outdoor play areas. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) guidelines recommend that you have a minimum distance of twice the height from the pivot point to the protective surfacing (both in front of and in back of the swings). If the distance from the ground to the pivot point measures 6 feet, the use zone for swings would be 12 feet in front of the swing and 12 feet to the rear. Make sure all mounts are tight and that links are in good condition. Remove broken swings from the frame immediately (do not wrap them around the upper bar).

Supervision

All staffing ratio requirements must be met on the outdoor play area to ensure that you have proper supervision (see Section 2 for more information regarding staffing ratios). It is important to make sure that every part of the play area can be seen at all times. Tunnels of any length need view windows or portholes. Check your play area for blind spots. Simple rules are very important for safe play areas

and increase successful supervision. “Take your turn and never push,” “Rails, fences, and walls are not for climbing,” etc. Remember, small children need few rules. A maximum of five rules for safe outdoor play should be sufficient, with fewer rules for toddlers.

Note: Licensing requires that you maintain maximum group sizes at all times, including on the outdoor play area. There cannot be more than 14 toddlers, 20 preschool children, or 30 school-age children playing in the same area at the same time. To meet this requirement on large playgrounds, centers can use small fences to divide the playground into separate areas that help ensure the climbing equipment is age appropriate and meets children’s developmental levels.

Injury Protection and Prevention

Falls from play equipment onto hard surfaces are one of the leading causes of serious injuries and

death of young children. Active play is necessary for optimal physical development but play equipment must be made as safe as possible for children. Surfaces must be soft and forgiving. Asphalt, cement, grass and dirt are unforgiving of a small child’s falling body. Materials such as wood chips, pea gravel, or rubber matting approved for playground fall protection must be under all climbing equipment and swings. This ground cover must be deep enough to absorb and cushion the impact of a falling body. The National Program for Playground Safety and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommend a depth of 6 to 12 inches, depending upon the height of the structure (U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, 1994). The material should extend at least 6 feet around the structure. This area is referred to as the “fall zone.”

The Consumer Product Safety Commission sets standards for playground equipment safety. The table below lists their recommendations for protective surface materials for playgrounds.

Loose-fill Playground Surfacing Materials: Depth Needed

Height of Platform/ Equipment	Type and minimum uncompressed (not packed down) depth at point of impact (more must be installed to account for scatter and compression.)
5'	6" – 12" of medium gravel
6'	6" of double-shredded bark mulch 6" of engineered wood fibers (previously known as uniform wood chips) 6" of fine gravel 12" of medium gravel
7'	6" of wood chips 9" of engineered wood fibers 9" of fine gravel
10'	9" of wood chips 9" of double-shredded bark mulch 12" of fine gravel
11'	12" of wood chips 12" of double-shredded bark mulch

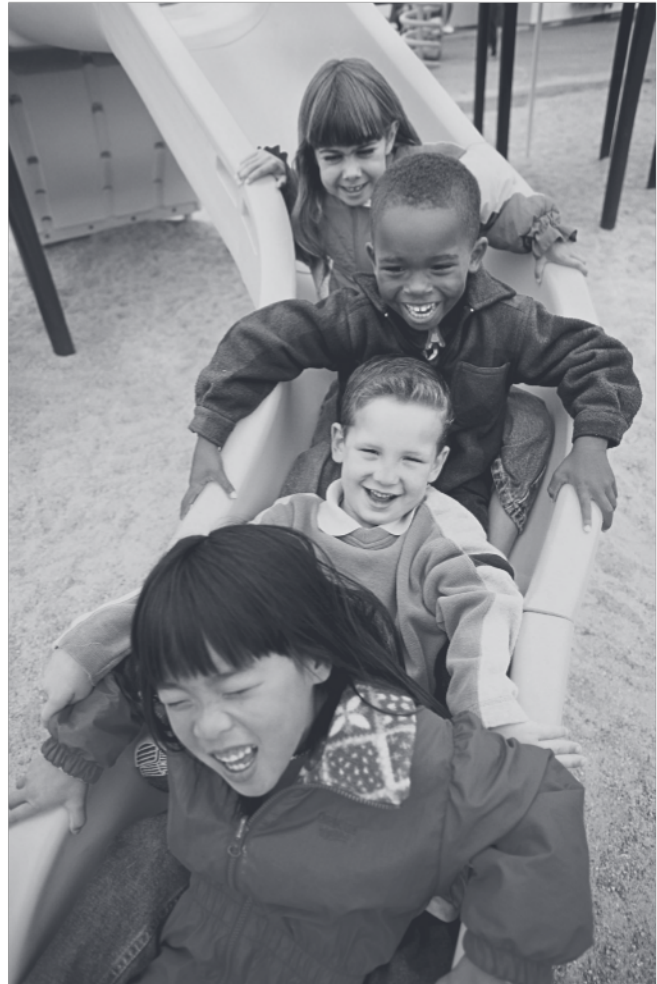
**Adapted from "Critical Heights (in feet) of Tested Materials," Table 1, page 5. For characteristics (fall-absorbing characteristics, installation/maintenance, advantages and disadvantages) of organic and inorganic loose-fill materials and of unitary synthetic materials, see Appendix C, page 38-39. Loose-fill surfacing materials in list above are described in Appendix D, page 40. Handbook for Public Playground Safety. Pub. No. 325, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, DC 1994. Used with permission.*

There also needs to be sufficient space around swings, slides, etc., for children and adults to move around safely on the play area. All climbing, swinging, and sliding equipment should be secured to the ground and stable. Concrete footings and anchors for this equipment must not be visible.

Site Maintenance

The outdoor area requires a thorough check on a daily basis, preferably in the morning before children arrive. All debris should be removed. A rake may be needed for sandy or graveled areas. Look for and remove standing water and drainage from downspouts, roofs, or structures. Standing water can harbor a number of bacteria, germs, waterborne illnesses, and disease spreading insects (it is also a potential drowning hazard).

Examine every piece of equipment. Look for missing parts, protruding bolts or fixtures that could catch or hang up a running child. Exposed metal rusts and can harbor germs and viruses dangerous to an open cut. All rust should be removed and the metal surface covered with rust- preventing material. Wood surfaces should be checked for wear. Plastic also wears and hardens as it ages and can crack and become a hazard.



Note: Licensing requires you to periodically check your playground equipment and ground cover for proper maintenance. You should keep accurate written records of your playground maintenance for your licensor to review.

A Sample Playground Maintenance Form is included on the following page for your convenience.

Maintenance Checklist for Playgrounds

GENERAL UPKEEP

- ☐ Check that area is free of miscellaneous debris and litter.
- ☐ Check that trash or garbage is not accessible to children.
- ☐ Check for any broken or missing pieces of equipment.

SURFACING

- ☐ Check for equipment which does not have adequate protective surfacing under and around it and for surfacing materials that have deteriorated.
- ☐ Check for protrusions and projections, like nuts, bolts, or bar ends.
- ☐ Check for missing or damaged protective caps or plugs.
- ☐ Check for potential clothing entanglement hazards, such as open S-hooks.
- ☐ Check for pinch, crush, and shearing points or exposed moving parts.
- ☐ Check for trip hazards, such as exposed footings on anchoring devices and rocks, roots, or any other environmental obstacles in the play area.

DETERIORATION OF EQUIPMENT

- ☐ Check all equipment and other playground features for rust, rot cracks, and splinters, with special attention to possible corrosion where structures come in contact with the ground.
- ☐ Check for unstable anchoring of equipment.

SECURITY OF HARDWARE

- ☐ Check for any loose or worn connecting or fastening hardware devices: for example, check the S-hooks at both ends of suspending elements of swings and all connection points of flexible climbing devices for wear.

EQUIPMENT USE ZONES

- ☐ Check for obstacles in equipment use zones.
- ☐ Check for 6 feet of fall/use zones around all climbing equipment.

DRAINAGE SYSTEMS

- ☐ Check the entire play area for drainage problems, with special attention to heavy use or areas such as those under swings and slide exits regions.

Signature _____ Inspection Date _____

Source: U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, "Handbook for Public Playground Safety". 1991