DURHAM REGION HEALTH DEPARTMENT

# Wee Care Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2026

## Extreme Temperatures

Although extreme temperatures can affect everyone, infants and children are more at risk for health impacts. It is important to think about child care indoor and outdoor environments and to take steps to keep all children and child care providers healthy and safe throughout the year.

The Durham Region Health Department issues notifications regarding both extreme heat and extreme cold. **Child care operators can go to durham.ca to send an email to subscribe to receive environmental health hazard notifications. When sending the email, use "subscribe" as the subject heading.**

### Extreme Heat

Extreme heat (also known as a heat wave) involves unusually high temperatures and/or humidity. It can lead to heat illnesses and sometimes death. Extreme heat events can also impact well-being in other ways. It can affect children's behaviour and learning capacity and may also impact community services including health care and energy supplies. While extreme heat can put everyone at risk of heat illness, infants and young children are more likely to be affected by the heat.

### Heat Related Health Impacts

Heat-related illnesses can range from heat rash and muscle cramps to more dangerous situations like heat stroke and heat exhaustion. During extreme heat events it is important to keep children cool and to avoid additional stress on their bodies.

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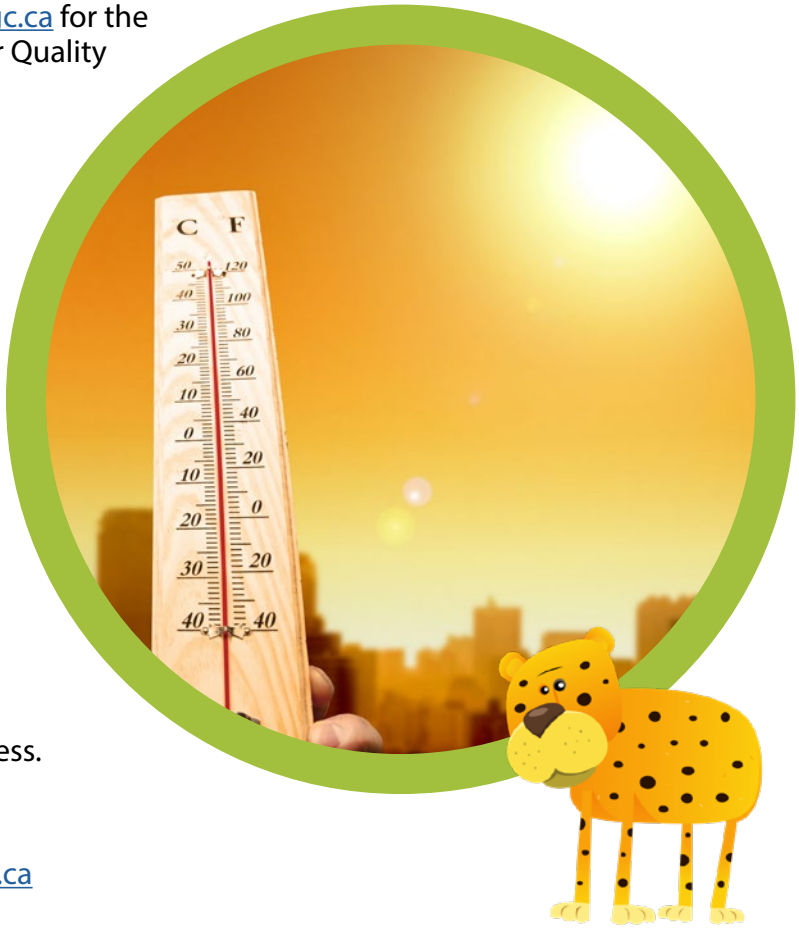
# Extreme Temperatures (cont'd)

## During an Extreme Heat Alert, you are encouraged to take the following precautions to protect the children in your care:

- Check the local weather forecast at weather.gc.ca for the temperature, humidex, heat warnings, the Air Quality Health Index, and Ultraviolet (UV) Index.
- Stay indoors in cool, well-ventilated areas.
- Keep children hydrated; they should drink plenty of water before they feel thirsty.
- Reduce outdoor activities or reschedule them to a time when it's cooler.
- Reduce children's activity in areas with direct sun exposure and allow children to rest often in shaded areas.
- Promote the use of lightweight, light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing, wide-brimmed hats, sunglasses with both UVA and UVB protection, and sunscreen with an appropriate Sun Protection Factor (SPF).
- Ensure outdoor play areas have sufficient shade. Consider planting trees or using built shade structures.
- Ensure that staff are trained to recognize and respond to the symptoms of heat-related illness.




## For Further Information Visit:

Extreme heat events: Related resources - Canada.ca
Extreme Heat and Humidity - Region of Durham.
Extreme Heat: Guidance for Schools and Child Care Centres document at durham.ca

## Extreme Cold

Exposure to cold weather conditions can be harmful for both children and child care providers. However, those most at risk are infants and young children. Prolonged exposure to the cold can result in serious health problems including frostbite and hypothermia. Many factors play a role in how children's bodies react to the cold. These include environmental factors such as temperature, wind, and sun, as well as individual factors such as clothing and level of activity.

## Cold Related Health Impacts

**Hypothermia** occurs when the body's core temperature drops below 35 degrees Celsius. If this occurs, there can be severe consequences, including organ failure and death.

**Frostbite** can also occur in cold weather when skin freezes. In severe cases, if deeper tissues freeze, this can result in the need for amputation.

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**The Durham Region Health Department issues Extreme Cold Weather alerts when the temperature is forecasted to reach minus 15 degrees Celsius (-15°C) or colder and/or when the wind chill is forecasted to reach minus 20 degrees Celsius (-20°C) or colder.**

## During a Cold Weather Alert, you are encouraged to take the following precautions to protect the children in your care:

- Check the local weather forecast at Weather Information - Environment Canada for the temperature, wind chill, and cold warnings before going outside.
- Limit exposure to extreme cold weather - consider having children stay indoors and reschedule or limit outdoor activities, especially if it's windy.
- Ask parents/legal guardians to provide layered clothing, with the outer clothing layers being windproof and waterproof.
- Advise parents/legal guardians that it is best to provide silk, wool, or polypropylene inner layers rather than cotton as these fabrics help to preserve body heat.
- Before going outside, make sure that the children are dressed appropriately to prevent heat loss and frostbite - use hats, scarves, gloves/mittens, warm socks, and warm boots to ensure that children's heads, faces, ears, necks, and feet are well protected.
- Frequently check children's hands, faces, and feet to ensure that they remain appropriately dressed while outside. They may be too distracted or may not have the ability to tell an adult they are cold.
- Avoid having children remain in wet clothing (e.g., hats, gloves, socks) as this could increase their risk for hypothermia or frostbite.

- Provide warm fluids or have children warm up by taking regular breaks inside heated buildings when enjoying winter activities outside.
- Ensure that staff are trained to recognize and treat/respond to the symptoms of hypothermia and frostbite. See Health Canada's It's Your Health – Extreme Cold for information.
- Maintain your child care facility at 20 degrees Celsius (20°C) or above per the requirements of the Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA).

## For More Information Visit:

It's Your Health – Extreme Cold - Health Canada
Cold Weather - Region of Durham

# Respiratory Etiquette - Cover Your Cough or Sneeze

Sneezing and coughing are part of the body's internal defense system. When something irritates the lining of our nose, sneezing is our body's response to the irritant. Sneezes forcefully expel air and mucus droplets out of the nose and mouth in an attempt to clear our nasal passages and eliminate the irritant. Similarly, when something irritates the throat or trachea, coughing forcefully expels air and mucus in an attempt to clear our airways and prevent irritants from travelling lower to affect the lungs.

The irritants contained in mucus droplets are often viruses, bacteria, dust, pollen particles, pollution, or smoke that could trigger allergic reactions or result in infections of the nasal passages, airways, and lungs. The force of a sneeze or cough can send thousands of mucus droplets into the air where they may either be suspended for some time or fall to contaminate surrounding surfaces. Other people can become ill as a result of inhaling viral or bacterial particles or by touching surfaces contaminated by these particles and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.

Many respiratory illnesses including influenza, COVID-19, pneumonia, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), measles, tuberculosis, the common cold, and fifth disease can be spread by coughing or sneezing. To avoid transmitting such illnesses, child care staff should practice good respiratory etiquette by ensuring that they always cough or sneeze into their sleeve or a tissue and they should teach children to do the same.

## In addition to encouraging respiratory etiquette, child care centres need to:

- Enforce policies that require staff and children to remain home if they are sick.
- Make sure that staff and children immediately throw away used tissues.
- Monitor children daily, assessing for signs or symptoms of illness at drop off and throughout the day.
- Ensure that staff and children wash their hands properly and often.
- Frequently clean and disinfect high-touch, shared surfaces such as toys, chair backs, table tops, doorknobs, light switches, and computer keyboards.

# IPAC Measures – During Increased Levels of Respiratory Illness

While the Durham Region Health Department is not currently declaring respiratory outbreaks in child care centres, we recognize that child care centres are continuing to experience increased levels of respiratory illness so far in 2026. In particular, high levels of Influenza (H3N2 strain predominantly), COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) have been observed.

## Common Respiratory Symptoms May Include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches/joint pain
- Shortness of breath
- Runny nose/congestion

**Note: Children infected with COVID-19 and/or influenza H3N2 can often present with enteric symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, and stomach pain/discomfort in addition to any of the respiratory symptoms listed above.**

If the children and/or staff in your child care facility are experiencing respiratory symptoms, we recommend that the following infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures be promptly implemented.

## Infection Control Measures Related to Respiratory Illnesses

- Prevent staff movement between rooms whenever possible.
- Ensure staff and children perform frequent and thorough hand hygiene. Resources include our Handwashing and Hand sanitizers posters.
- A 70-90 percent concentration is required for alcohol-based hand sanitizer (ABHR) products. Ensure products have not expired.
- Ensure staff and children practice respiratory etiquette – i.e. cough/sneeze into a tissue or into their elbow. See our Cover your Cough poster.
- When tending to children with respiratory symptoms and/or when there are high levels of respiratory illness circulating within the child care centre, staff are advised to wear a medical mask and eye protection. It is also recommended that children who develop respiratory symptoms while at the centre wear a medical mask, if tolerated, and be separated from other children and staff until they can be sent home.
- Clean and disinfect toys at least daily, and immediately if observed to have been contaminated.
- Increase the frequency of environmental cleaning and sanitizing/disinfection of high touch surfaces to at least twice daily (e.g. toilet fixtures, sinks/faucets, countertops, floor mats, tables, doorknobs, phones, light switches, keyboards, touch screens, computers, etc.).

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# IPAC Measures – During Increased Levels of Respiratory Illness (cont'd)

  - Follow manufacturer's instructions on the product label regarding proper sanitizer/disinfectant use and contact time (e.g., Oxivir TB/ 1-minute contact time).
  - If bleach is used, mix 10mL bleach to each 90mL water (15oz bleach to each 1 gal. water) to provide a 5000ppm solution and apply for 10-minute contact time. **Note:** for convenience, consider switching to a disinfectant with a shorter contact time (e.g., 1-5 minutes) to ensure contact times are achieved.
  - Always have appropriate test strips available to ensure that you are mixing and maintaining sanitizer/ disinfectant products at the proper concentrations.
- Suspend group sensory/water play and temporarily remove all plush/absorbent items from rooms with increased cases of illness.
- Ensure diligent daily screening for symptoms and prompt exclusion of any symptomatic staff and children.
  - Encourage staff/parents to monitor for symptoms prior to attending at your centre. If staff or children are symptomatic, they should advise the centre and stay home!
  - Post the Attention Respiratory Illness poster at your front entrance and add any other symptoms (e.g., enteric symptoms - diarrhea/vomiting) in the blank spaces as applicable.
  - Symptomatic children must be immediately separated from others and be monitored in a supervised area until they can go home. If tolerated, symptomatic children should wear a medical mask until they leave the centre.
- Contaminated items belonging to an ill child (including soiled clothing) must be sent home in a securely tied plastic bag for cleaning/laundering. Soiled items must not be rinsed or washed at the centre.
- Do not allow new admissions or transfers of children between rooms or age groups.
- Limit parent/placement student/volunteer/and visitor access to the centre and suspend centre tours.

## Returning to the Child Care Centre

- **Any children or staff excluded due to respiratory symptoms should not return to the centre until they are symptom free and have had no fever for a minimum 24 hours (48 hours if there have also been any enteric symptoms).**
- Upon their return to the child care centre, children (if tolerated) and staff should wear a medical mask while at the centre for a total of 10 days from their symptom onset/swab date (if tested), whichever occurred first. **Note:** children under 2 years do not need to mask.
- During their recovery period, if children/staff remove their mask, they should avoid interacting with other children or staff as much as possible (e.g., during meals or breaks).
- Recovering children should avoid indoor activities that involve mask removal and/or heavy breathing (e.g., singing, playing a wind instrument, boisterous play).

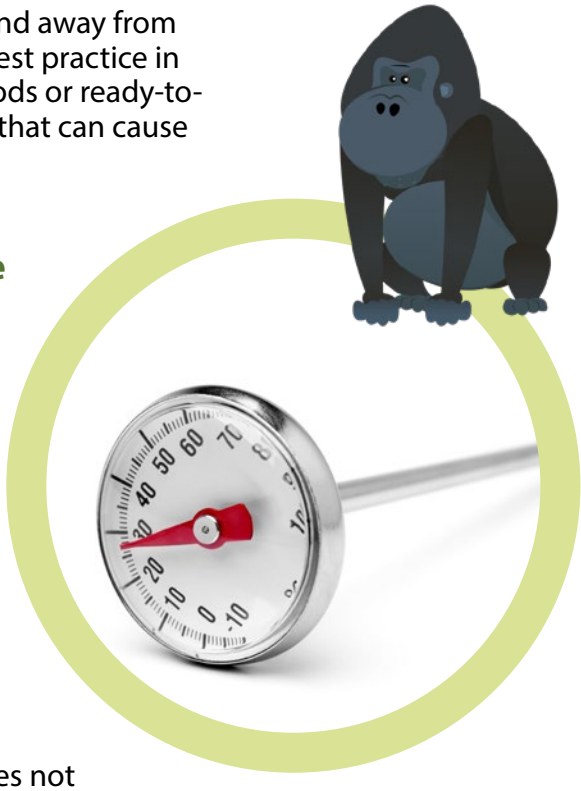
## Additional Resources at durham.ca

Illness Exclusion Versus an Outbreak chart
Attention-Respiratory Illness poster
Facts About…Influenza
Preventing the Spread of Influenza (Flu) in Child Care Centres
Facts About…Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19)
Illness, Infection and Disease

# Safe Kitchen Practices – Questions & Answers

## Q: Where is the best place to store my egg cartons/trays of eggs in the fridge?

**A:** Uncooked eggs must always be stored below and away from ready-to-eat or ready-to-reheat foods. This is the best practice in case any eggs break and drip onto ready-to-eat foods or ready-to-reheat foods and contaminate them with bacteria that can cause illness.



## Q: Should I be verifying the hot and cold food temperatures upon arrival each time catered food or groceries are delivered?

**A:** Yes! Hazardous cold foods need to be maintained at a temperature of 4°C or less until service and hazardous hot foods need to be maintained at 60°C or hotter until service to be safe. If your centre receives delivered groceries or catered prepared foods, check the temperatures of these foods upon delivery using your probe thermometer. Do not accept any foods that have not been maintained at proper temperatures during transport and immediately communicate issues to the company. The grocery delivery/food catering company can make the necessary adjustments to ensure this does not occur again.

## Q: My centre purchases food items from local grocery stores. How can I ensure the food is safe during transportation?

**A:** You want to ensure that hazardous cold foods stay cold at 4°C or colder and that frozen foods remain frozen. Hazardous food items like sandwich meats, dairy products, cut fruit/vegetables, raw or processed meats, tofu, and frozen foods, need to be transported in insulated bags or insulated coolers. Ice packs can also be used in the summertime to help maintain hazardous cold food items at the proper temperatures. You never know when you may be stuck in traffic longer than expected and you do not want food to go to waste or to be the cause of a bacterial illness.

## Remember:

- When out running errands and/or purchasing items for your child care centre always make the grocery store your last stop before returning to the centre to minimize the time cold/frozen hazardous foods remain in your vehicle.
- Raw foods (like raw meats and eggs) must be packaged for transportation separately from ready-to-eat foods to prevent accidental cross-contamination that can lead to illness.
- Ensure you unload all cold/frozen hazardous foods into the fridge/freezer as soon as you return to the centre.
- After transporting raw hazardous foods, clean and sanitize the interior of your cooler/insulated bags.

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# Safe Kitchen Practices – Questions & Answers (cont'd)

## Q: My child care centre receives catered hot meals, and we do not have enough room in the warming unit to keep the food hot at 60°C or higher. What should we do?

**A:** If your centre has an oven, you can set it to a suitable temperature to hot hold the foods and then verify with your probe thermometer that the required hot holding temperature is maintained. If you have a stove-top/induction cooker, this can be used to hot-hold liquid food items such as curry, stew, or soup, by transferring the food into a pot and continuing to verify that the proper hot holding temperature is maintained (occasional stirring is needed). If you do not have any available room in the warming unit and do not have an alternate heating appliance, you must acquire another warming unit (usually provided by the caterer upon request). You cannot stack hazardous food inserts on top of rather than inside the warming unit as **THIS WILL NOT** hot hold the foods at or above 60°C as required. Hazardous foods that are maintained at improper temperatures (between 4°C and 60°C) are susceptible to rapid bacterial growth and are a major cause of food-borne illness.

## Q: Can rodenticides (poison used to kill rodents) be used in a child care centre?

**A:** When a rodent infestation is identified in a child care centre a licensed pest control operator must be contracted, and an integrated pest management (IPM) program should be implemented. In an IPM program several other steps should be taken before the use of rodenticides is considered.

### Integrated Pest Management Steps:

1. **Conduct an Assessment:** To identify the rodent species; possible entry points; any available food, water and harbourage sources; and to analyze areas where there are droppings, gnaw marks, runways, rub marks and nest sites.
2. **Implement Sanitation Measures:** Remove factors that attract rodents by ensuring that food is stored in sealed containers, spills are cleaned up promptly, clutter is eliminated, and garbage is removed frequently.
3. **Seal Entry Points:** Prevent rodents from entering your centre by sealing any holes ¼-inch or larger and repairing gaps around doors, utility lines, vents, and foundations. Use rodent-proof materials.
4. **Modify the Environment:** Trim vegetation away from buildings, remove outdoor food sources, reduce clutter indoors and outdoors, and improve storage practices.
5. **Monitor and Utilize Mechanical Controls:** Including traps, electronic monitoring systems, tracking powder (to see where rodents are moving), and log any activities observed.

**Rodenticides should not be considered unless all of the above measures prove to be ineffective in eliminating a rodent infestation. They are a last resort and not a first line tool.**

### Important Notes:

- Rodenticides (poison bait stations) may only be applied by a licensed pest control operator.
- Rodenticides must be provided in block form (not pellets) within tamper-resistant bait stations.
- Tamper-resistant rodenticide bait stations can only be used in areas that are completely inaccessible to children - such as inside air vents, or in locked storage rooms, staff rooms, furnace/boiler rooms, or inaccessible areas outside a child care centre. They may NOT be used in any food storage, food preparation, or food service areas.


# Check Your Supply of Potassium Iodide (KI) Pills

Child care centres located within a 10-kilometre radius of the Pickering or Darlington Nuclear Generating Stations are required to maintain a supply of potassium iodide (KI) pills. If you have not reviewed your KI pill supply recently, please take a moment to confirm that your child care centre has an adequate and up-to-date inventory.

If your centre is located within the 10-kilometre radius of either nuclear station and you require additional KI pills, or if your site is new and did not receive an initial supply, please contact Senior Public Health Inspector Philip Barrocas at Philip.Barrocas@durham.ca.

Centres located 10–50 kilometres from either nuclear station are not required to order KI pills but are encouraged to do so at preparetobesafe.ca.

## 2026 KI Pill Redistribution

This year, Ontario Power Generation (OPG), in partnership with Durham Region Health Department and Toronto Emergency Management, will provide replacement KI pills to residents within the 10-kilometre radius. These pills will replace those originally distributed in 2015, which expire in 2027. This redistribution **does not apply to child care centres**, and no action is required unless your centre needs additional KI pills. However, this is a good opportunity to confirm the following:

**KI Pill Storage:** Ensure KI pills are stored securely and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

**Adequate Supply:** Verify there are enough KI pills on-site for all children and staff.

**Inventory Management:** Maintain updated records of pill quantities, expiry dates, and storage locations.

**Policies & Procedures:** Confirm written procedures exist for administering KI pills and conducting regular inventory audits.

**Parent/Guardian Communication:** Distribute KI information letters and consent forms annually.

**Consent Awareness:** Staff must be aware of any children who do not have parental/guardian consent for KI administration.

## About KI Pills

Potassium iodide (KI) is a stable iodine salt that is used as a protective measure during a nuclear emergency involving the release of radioactive iodine. If taken at the correct time and dose, KI fills the thyroid gland with stable iodine, helping to prevent or reduce the absorption of radioactive iodine.

In the unlikely event of a nuclear emergency, instructions to take KI pills will come directly from Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and will be communicated through media channels such as TV, radio, and the internet.

For more information, contact the Durham Health Connection Line at 905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729, or visit preparetobesafe.ca/.

# REMINDER!
# Update your contact information

From time-to-time, there may be an urgent message that Durham Region Health Department will have to send to all child care centres. A current contact list will help us distribute the information to you more efficiently. If your centre has had any changes to your child care centre contacts, such as managers, supervisors, telephone numbers, or e-mail addresses, please forward the new information to ehl@durham.ca to update the list.

**Please print and post this e-newsletter in a common area for those who do not have access to email.**

The WEE CARE Newsletter is published and distributed by Durham Region Health Department, Health Protection Division, and is distributed to licensed child care centres in Durham Region.

Questions, comments, and article submissions can be forwarded to ehl@durham.ca.

Editor: Toni Moran

Acknowledgements: Health Protection Division

We would like to remind all child care centre owners, supervisors, and staff that we welcome any suggestions that you may have for future article topics or ideas and any comments you have to improve the newsletter!

*We welcome your ideas and suggestions!*

Please submit comments by email to ehl@durham.ca.

March 2026