DURHAM REGION HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Wee Care Newsletter

Spring / Summer 2025

The 5 Most Frequently Observed Child Care Inspection Infractions in 2024

Public health inspectors are required to conduct annual inspections in licensed child care settings to observe and review the existing infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures and to make recommendations for implementation of additional measures as required. In addition, public health inspectors ensure that the necessary policies are in place to reduce the risk of disease transmission.

Below is a list of the top 5 infractions noted by public health inspectors during inspections conducted in 2024 along with an explanation of their importance in preventing disease transmission and / or injury in the centre.

1. **Toys, teaching materials, surfaces, equipment, and / or furniture maintained clean and in good repair.**
   - Toys and play-based learning are essential to a child's growth and development and are an integral part of a child care program. When toys become contaminated with microorganisms from dirty hands and saliva, they can be excellent vehicles for the spread of common childhood diseases, including pink eye, hand, foot and mouth disease and the common cold as well as for more potentially serious illnesses like norovirus, measles, chicken pox or COVID-19.
   - Provide children with toys that can withstand frequent cleaning and disinfection or laundering. The surfaces of toys that require cleaning and disinfection must be non-absorbent and easy to clean. Ensure that toys are not damaged or broken, and that they have no cracks or missing parts, as this will impact the effectiveness of proper cleaning and disinfecting.
2. **Outdoor play space has no health and safety hazards (excluding play structure).**
   - See below for articles on outdoor play area safety.

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The 5 Most Frequently Observed Child Care Inspection Infractions in 2024 (cont'd)

3. **Safety measures in place for all accessible electrical outlets.**
    - A child's curious nature may cause them to touch and explore everything around them. Children can become severely injured by touching or placing objects into electrical outlets. Because of this, it is important that all accessible outlets in a child care centre:
        - Are tamper resistant (have a TR stamp), or
        - Have an ESA certification letter OR a written document from an electrician or owner / operator, or school board as applicable, stating that all outlets are tamper resistant, or
        - Have a visible safety plug.

    *Exemptions are outlets that have a large appliance constantly plugged in (e.g. washer / dryer, stove fridge, freezer), or an outlet that is more than 2m above the floor.

4. **Diaper change table / mat / safety straps properly designed and in good repair.**
    - Microorganisms exist everywhere, including in body fluids such as urine and stool. Because of this, children and child care providers are at risk of becoming ill if the diaper changing table, mat and straps cannot be properly cleaned and disinfected.
    - To allow for proper cleaning and disinfection of the diaper change mat, it must be smooth, non-absorbent and designed in a manner that it can be easily cleaned and disinfected. Mats that are absorbent and / or quilted cannot be properly cleaned and disinfected. Absorbent mats can harbour microorganisms permitting the spread of infection.
    - If a mat is torn or worn out, it must be replaced. Repairing the mat with tape or glue is not acceptable as the surface will no longer be smooth and easily cleanable.
    - If the mat is equipped with safety straps, the straps must be made of smooth, non-absorbent material which allows them to be easily cleaned and disinfected (e.g., not braided nylon straps).

5. **Absorbent materials laundered / cleaned and disinfected / discarded weekly (e.g. slipcovers, dress-up clothes, plush toys, puzzles, cardboard).**
    - Similar to other toys and materials, those that are absorbent, such as plush toys and dress-up clothes, can act as a vehicle for the spread of many illnesses. It is therefore important that these items are adequately cleaned and disinfected or discarded as required.
    - Children may have access to and share absorbent / plush items as long as:
        - The facility is not in outbreak.
        - Items are removed immediately to be laundered / cleaned / discarded if contaminated with blood or body fluids (e.g., mouthed, drooled on, sneezed / coughed on).
        - Absorbent / plush items are routinely laundered / cleaned / discarded weekly, at a minimum.
        - There is sufficient staff supervision to ensure that contaminated items are not shared and are immediately removed when the child is finished with the item.

    *Note: Plush toys with batteries inside that do not detach cannot be shared because they cannot be laundered.

How to Manage a Power Outage

From time to time child care centres may experience a power outage due to extreme weather events, accidents that result in downed power lines, construction / renovations, etc.. The following guidance can assist you to handle such occurrences in the safest manner possible.

During a prolonged power outage, child care facilities must generally remain closed to ensure the health and safety of the children and staff at the centre. An exception might be if a child care centre has a back-up generator that enables them to maintain power for all operations including lighting, ventilation, refrigeration, private water, sewage system and other essential equipment.

Food Safety During a Power Outage

If you are aware that your centre has been without power for greater than 4 hours, please ensure the following:

- Thow out all perishable foods from your refrigerator or freezer if the thermometers in the units are observed to be above their required temperatures (i.e. 4°C or colder for refrigerators and -18°C or colder for freezers). Remember that food contaminated with bacteria does not always smell bad or appear spoiled.
- Any food items that have an obvious unusual smell or colour should be discarded.
- A full chest freezer should be able to maintain its temperature for up to 48 hours; a half full chest freezer for 24 hours.
- Food that has thawed in a freezer, but that still contains ice crystals or that is probed and found to be 4°C or colder can be refrozen or cooked.
- To help maintain the internal temperatures of refrigerators and freezers longer, you can add bags of ice. You can also transfer cold or frozen perishable foods to an alternate, operational refrigerator or freezer at another facility until power is restored and your units are back to their required temperatures.
- Avoid opening refrigerator or freezer doors as this will cause temperatures to rise and foods to spoil faster.
- If any raw hazardous foods (e.g. meats, fish, dairy, eggs) have thawed or spilled in your fridge or freezer, make sure you clean and sanitize the area thoroughly.
- **If you are unsure about anything remember When in doubt – Throw it out!**

How to Manage a Power Outage (cont'd)

For more details, please see the following links:

Food Safety in an emergency:
canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-drinking-water-safe-emergency.html

Food Safety After a Power Outage:
durham.ca/en/health-and-wellness/food-safety.aspx#Your-refrigerator-freezer-combination

Safe Private Water Supplies During a Power Outage

If you are on a private water system, please check your treatment system to ensure it is functioning properly. For further information, please see the following links:

Be Well Aware – Ensure your well water is safe during and after emergencies:
canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/water-talk-ensure-well-water-safe-during-after-emergencies.html

Flooding and drinking water:
durham.ca/en/health-and-wellness/flooding.aspx#Flooding-and-drinking-water

General Private Well information:
durham.ca/en/living-here/private-wells.aspx

If you have any further questions or concerns, please reach out to your public health inspector by calling the Durham Health Connection Line at 905-668-2020/1-800-841-2729 or email health@durham.ca.

Outdoor Safety

Outdoor Play Areas – General Safety

A safe place to play, run, imagine, and enjoy the outdoors can be a fun and stimulating atmosphere for children and is a key component of many child care settings. Even with all the great things outdoor play areas have to offer, they may present safety concerns to the children that use them. In addition, outdoor activities like those involving water and sandboxes are often used by many children at the setting and unless properly maintained, can be a way for pathogenic microorganisms and infections to spread. By following the proper safety and infection prevention and control (IPAC) practices outlined below you can help to ensure that outdoor activities are safe and enjoyable for all children.

- Outdoor play areas must be inspected by staff daily for animal droppings, broken glass, sharp objects, tripping hazards, standing water, etc. before allowing children access to the area.
- Check all vegetation and remove all sharp protruding thorns or branches, remove all dead or decaying limbs capable of falling in playground area, and remove roots that create tripping hazards in high traffic areas.
- Playground equipment should be free of protruding nails, screws, bolts or sharp edges, and must meet Canadian Standards Association (CSA) safety standards.
- Supports for playground equipment should be secured to the ground and concrete should be buried under a suitable surface.
- Any outdoor play space, fixed play structure or surfacing under those structures must meet the requirements set out in the CSA standard CAN / CSA-Z614-14 and be inspected by staff on a regular basis. If assistance is needed, external third-party inspectors may be required.
- Maintain the fence in the outside play area in good repair and of sturdy construction. Bolts should be protruding no more than a 2 thread count from their nuts and their ends must be smoothed or must be capped. Note: Bolts longer than a 2 thread count that are capped are still considered a protrusion that could lead to injury.

A suitable outdoor play area:

- Allows child care staff to easily supervise children
- Should be away from high traffic areas
- Has good drainage for rainwater
- Is free of debris, and any structures or equipment that are broken, worn or otherwise in disrepair
- Is enclosed by a fence that has a gate that cannot be opened by a young child
- Has a protective surface such as uncompacted pea-gravel, rubber, sand / pea-gravel mix, or mulching where any elevated play equipment is located

Outdoor Sandboxes

Children love to spend time playing in a sandbox. By following the proper infection prevention and control (IPAC) practices, a sandbox can be a safe play environment.

Placement of Sandboxes

The sandbox should be located in an area that is well shaded. If this is not possible, provide a protective shade cover over the sandbox.

Selection of Sand

Some types of sand can cause respiratory problems due to the presence of silica. Use clean, silica-free play sand in the sandbox. When sand is purchased for sandboxes, it should be labelled as play sand and must indicate that it is silica-free; otherwise, it must not be used. Sand used for sandboxes is potentially capable of supporting the growth of microorganisms. Treating sand with disinfectants in an attempt to clean and disinfect the sand is not effective. Sand must be replaced on a regular basis. The frequency of sand replacement will depend on the amount of use the sandbox receives.

Sandbox Maintenance

Outdoor sandboxes must be covered with a tight fitting, non-absorbent cover or lid when not in use. The sandbox cover should be securely fastened to prevent children, animals, insects, water and debris from getting under it. When the sandbox is in use, the cover should be stored in a safe manner.

Before each use, sandboxes must be visually inspected for signs of contamination and safety hazards such as animal feces, insects, sharp objects or other foreign objects. It is important to use a rake to inspect the sand under its surface, because hazards can be easily hidden.

If the sand becomes wet, ensure it is dried thoroughly before the cover is replaced, as wet sand can harbour bacteria.

Children should not consume any food while playing in the sandbox as it can lead to them ingesting the sand and other contaminants. Ensure children wash their hands thoroughly after playing in the sandbox and after coming in from outside generally.

Toxoplasmosis is an illness caused by a parasite which can spread from animals to humans. Cat feces can contain this parasite. The consumption of contaminated sand by children may lead to infection. Symptoms of this disease can range from brain infection to pneumonia and death. Children must be well supervised while playing in the sandbox to ensure they do not ingest any sand or put their hands in their mouths. Ensure pregnant child care providers do not change the sand or remove feces from the sandbox because the parasite can harm their unborn child.

Outdoor Safety (cont'd)

Outdoor Water Play

Water can be a significant source of germs and, when contaminated, can easily spread infections. Germs can be found on the water play toys or in the water itself because germs like warm and wet environments.

If you have an outdoor water table, follow these recommendations to reduce the spread of germs:

- Staff must practice hand hygiene before set up.
- Ensure children practice hand hygiene before and after water play.
- Fill containers with clean water before each session / use.
- Ensure that children do not drink play water or place toys in their mouths and that no sponge toys are used.
- Dump water and clean and disinfect toys and containers after each session / use.
- Children with an infection of any kind or who have open sores or wounds, and those who are diapered cannot participate in group water play.
- Discontinue group water play table activities during an outbreak.

*See our Water Play Safety Poster for additional details.

Wading pools may spread infection and cause drowning and are therefore **not permitted for use**. Sprinklers are recommended for hot summer days instead of pools. If using a sprinkler, watch for pooling of water on the ground. Children may slip and injure themselves. If water collects, either move the sprinkler to another area or stop and resume its use once the water has drained.

Gardening

Gardening activities must involve a gardening soil that is safe for children. Do not use soil that contains manure and / or fertilizer. If tools, such as gardening gloves, shovels and rakes are provided, ensure they are made for children and properly sized for their use.

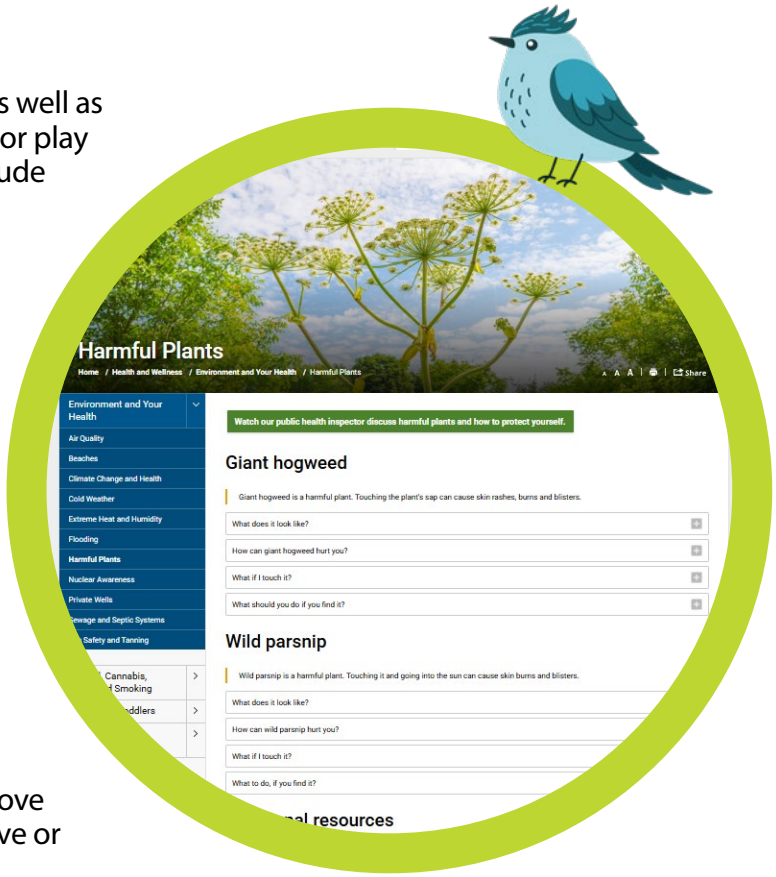
Children must be well supervised to prevent them from placing their hands in their mouth, touching their face or eating the soil / plants. Plants must not be poisonous and special care should be taken in selecting those that do not cause allergic reactions for children and or providers. Ensure children and providers wash their hands after gardening activities.

Backyard gardens, fruit trees, etc. may be exposed to animal feces, sewage, pesticides, herbicides or other unsafe chemicals which may potentially contaminate the fruits and vegetables being grown. For these reasons the consumption of "home grown" produce in child care settings is discouraged.

Outdoor Safety (cont'd)

Poisonous Plants

Children can encounter poisonous plants indoors as well as through their activities in parks, gardens and outdoor play areas. Common routes of exposure for children include ingestion of plant parts or contact with skin. It is important to note that many native plants, shrubs and trees in Durham Region may have poisonous parts that should not be ingested.



Some of the most common outdoor poisonous plants that might be found throughout Durham Region include wild parsnip, cow parsnip, poison ivy and giant hogweed. Many common garden plants are also poisonous including: crocus, daffodil, lily-of-the-valley, holly, yew, unripe tomatoes, all green parts of potatoes, oak and horse chestnut. Some common houseplants, including caladium (also known as elephant's ear), Dieffenbachia, Jerusalem cherry and philodendron are also poisonous.

Inspect outside play areas for poisonous plants and wild mushrooms before children go outdoors. Remove and properly discard all wild mushrooms and remove or restrict access to poisonous plants.

Tips to consider:

- Plants that are known to be poisonous should be removed from the child care setting.
- Teach children at an early age about the dangers of certain plants and how to recognize these plants.
- Do not allow children to taste or eat the nectar from flowers, as it can be poisonous.

For concerns about possible exposures to poisonous plants or other poisonous substances you can contact the Ontario Poison Centre at 1-844-764-7669 or visit our Harmful Plants webpage.

Steam Cleaning of Carpets

Carpets and area rugs in child care centres are usually located in high traffic areas and can quickly become dirty, causing them to require frequent cleaning. Maintaining carpets in a clean and sanitary manner requires daily vacuuming and periodic steam cleaning. Infant and toddler room carpets / area rugs must be steam cleaned at least monthly and more frequently if visibly soiled. Preschool and school age rooms must be steam cleaned at least every 6 months. Refer to our Child Care Cleaning and Disinfection Schedules for all cleaning and disinfection frequencies.

For convenience and to lower costs associated with steam cleaning, child care centres may look into purchasing their own steam cleaning units to steam clean their carpeting / area rugs. Consider the following prior to purchasing such units:

- The unit must employ steam to clean.
- The unit must not utilize a chemical cleaning solution in conjunction with steam in infant and toddler rooms. We do not want a chemical residue left on the rugs / carpeting as infants and toddlers may crawl on the carpets and area rugs and then put their hands in mouths or rub their eyes, etc. A compatible chemical cleaning solution can be used in pre-school and school age rooms.
- The units must be designed for use on carpeting / area rugs and not just hard flooring.

The Health Department does not approve specific brands or models of carpet steam cleaners, but if you have any additional questions prior to purchasing a unit, please contact your public health inspector.

Measles

Although measles is still very common in some parts of the world, cases in Canada have generally been rare due to high rates of measles immunization (MMR vaccine). Most cases that occur in Canada arise from travel or contact with people from areas where measles is common. Measles cases generally occur in young, un-immunized children, or in older individuals who have received only one dose of vaccine. In recent months Ontario has begun to see more measles cases due to a global increase in cases and due to vaccine hesitancy.

What is measles and how is it spread?

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory infection that is caused by a virus. The virus is spread easily from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Individuals can acquire infection by having direct contact with nose and throat secretions that are suspended in droplets in the air, or by touching their eyes, nose or mouth after touching a surface freshly contaminated with nose and throat secretions.

- Anyone who has not had the disease or who has not been fully immunized is at risk of getting measles if they are exposed to the virus.
- The measles virus can remain contagious in the air or on contaminated surfaces for at least 2 hours.
- Individuals infected with measles are contagious from 4 days before until 4 days after the rash appears.

Symptoms

Measles symptoms may start anywhere from seven to 21 days after exposure to someone with measles. Symptoms generally last for one to two weeks.

Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Red and watery eyes
- Feeling tired
- Small white spots (Koplik spots) can appear on the inside of the mouth and throat
- About three to seven days after symptoms begin, a red rash appears that typically begins on the head and spreads down the body to the arms and legs. The rash disappears in the same order of appearance (head to foot) in about four to seven days.

Measles can also lead to:

- Dehydration
- Ear infections
- Diarrhea
- Lung infections (pneumonia)
- Blindness
- Swelling of the brain (encephalitis)
- Hearing loss
- Seizures
- Permanent brain damage (subacute sclerosing panencephalitis)
- Death

Measles (cont'd)

Infants under 12 months and people who are pregnant or have weak immune systems can become very ill from measles infection.

Measles during pregnancy can lead to premature delivery, low birth weight, and miscarriage.

If a child care staff or child has experienced symptoms of measles prior to attending the child care centre they should stay home. If the child or staff starts to experience symptoms while at the child care centre they should be immediately excluded. In either case above, the individual should arrange to see their health care provider immediately for assessment. The healthcare facility / health care provider should be notified that measles is suspected prior to arrival so that appropriate precautions can be taken to prevent possible transmission.

To date, as of March 12, 2025, a total of 252 confirmed and 66 probable cases of measles have been reported in Ontario. All but five cases were associated with an ongoing multi-jurisdictional outbreak (On October 18, 2024, exposure to a travel-related case in New Brunswick led to outbreaks of measles in New Brunswick and Ontario). All 5 of the cases unrelated to the outbreak had a history of travel (i.e. acquired measles outside of Canada). Three of the 5 cases required hospitalization. All three of the hospitalized cases were unimmunized.

For more information about measles please refer to our measles webpage at durham.ca, or Public Health Ontario's Infectious Disease Trends in Ontario, or Diseases of Public Health Significance Cases.

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 centers in Durham Region.

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

Co-editors: Toni Moran and Veronica Memme

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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.