

NORTH CAROLINA CHILD CARE HEALTH AND SAFETY BULLETIN

NORTH CAROLINA CHILD CARE HEALTH AND SAFETY RESOURCE CENTER

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The NC Child Care Health and Safety Resource Center promotes safe and healthy environments for children in child care settings. Project Director: Dr. Jonathan Kotch, MD, MPH, FAAP.

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Safe Spaces for Children



Angela cut her leg on a nail that stuck out from the wooden side of the sand box. Malik tripped on the corner of a carpet that had curled up. Crystal choked on small Legos in the 2 year old room. Sophia bit Mateo when they were hidden from view by a 30 inch high shelf. Injuries like the ones these children experienced are preventable.

Safety practices help create an environment where very young children can safely explore the world with all their senses. They rely on adults to keep them safe. Preschool children are just beginning to recognize a potential danger. School-age children are developing skills, judgment, as well as the ability to recognize hazards. At the heart of all safety practices is close supervision, during which an early educator stays close by and is observant enough to prevent unsafe behavior from harming a child.

Early educators have a moral and professional responsibility to provide a hazard-free environment for children. Families depend on them to care for their children while they are away from home. Educators create environments that safely challenge children and support their development. They offer opportunities for children to play with developmentally appropriate materials and equipment. Early educators can adjust the environment based on how individual children in their program use the space. Families can also recommend accommodations to support a child's learning and reduce the risk of injury. For instance, a parent might share

that her child has difficulty getting started on an activity and likes to run around in large, open spaces. The early educator can set up clearly defined centers, with a few toys laid out to encourage play, and then help the child engage in play. Running can be encouraged in spaces designed for active play.

Through policies, procedures and commitment to following procedures, early educators and directors maintain safe indoor and outdoor environments. Child care centers and family child care homes develop policies and inform staff and parents about how they will provide for the children's safety throughout the day. They establish basic routines to maintain their safety policies and procedures. For example, a daily check of the outdoors before the children arrive allows staff to fluff or replace the mulch under climbing equipment or remove broken toys. Similar safety checks indoors might identify tripping or choking hazards.

Policies should address safety checks, facility repairs, indoor air quality, and outdoor play. They should include when procedures should be completed and who is responsible for carrying out the procedures.

When a safety issue is identified, the early educator has to use judgment to determine the level of hazard and how to deal with the hazard in a timely fashion. For example, medication within a child's reach presents a life threatening hazard and the hazard should be dealt with immediately. On the other hand, a hole in a screen can be fixed within a couple of weeks, because the window can be closed to keep insects out.

A safe environment prevents and reduces injuries and offers children the opportunity to explore without hurting themselves or others. Knowing that hazards are not present in the environment makes it easier to supervise children and encourage them in their play.

Safe Environments Indoors and Outdoors

Supervision

The first responsibility of early educators is to ensure children's safety. This means enough adults must be present to keep a watchful eye and a listening ear on each child, during both outdoor and indoor play. The recommended adult to child ratio depends on the age and development of the children. Smaller groups allow children and adults to develop safe, trusting relationships.

When each child is actively supervised, early educators are able to see and respond quickly to any problems that may occur. For example, if a two year old is learning to climb a ladder, the teacher can encourage her while watching closely to prevent injuries. Create spaces that invite play and allow early educators to visibly supervise children without interfering with their play.

The National Program for Playground Safety (NPPS) outlines the following ABC's of supervision.

- **Anticipation** Anticipate and prevent hazardous situations whenever possible. Keep a first aid kit handy at all times.
- **Behavior** Stay alert and attentive when supervising children. Intervene when a child's behavior may cause harm to himself or another child. Discuss playtime rules with children who can understand them.
- **Context** Be well-trained on safety and aware of the surroundings. Provide close supervision when the context is changed by the addition of new materials, a change in the mix of children or staff, or a change in routine.

The Air We Breathe

Air is polluted when it contains gases, fumes, and dust particles in harmful amounts. Air pollution irritates the lungs and respiratory system, can cause asthma or increase its severity, and affect the heart. Children breathe at a fast rate. Their lungs are developing, and they tend to be active outdoors. These characteristics increase young children's risk for damage to their respiratory and neurological systems.

Indoor Air Quality Indoor air is two to five times more polluted than outdoor air, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Indoor air pollutants can come from mold, dust mites, pesticides, pollen, rats, mice, cockroaches, cleaning agents, air fresheners, and off-gassing of chemicals from carpeting, paints, and furnishings.

When ventilation is not adequate, too few indoor air pollutants are circulated out of the building. High indoor temperatures and high humidity can increase some pollutants. Ways to reduce indoor air pollution include:

- Remove sources of pollutants, including air fresheners.
- Control moisture from leaks, standing water, etc.
- Provide adequate ventilation through a heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) system. Open windows as needed to exchange air.
- Keep ventilation system clean, dry, and in good repair. Keep vents open, change filters routinely, and have HVAC systems inspected regularly.
- Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to control pests.
- Schedule renovations, repairs, and cleaning when children are not present.



Outdoor Air Quality The daily forecast for outdoor air quality looks at ground-level ozone and particle pollution and is particularly useful during hot weather. The Air Quality Index is color coded to indicate increases in pollution and health risks. Pollution exposure depends on the length of time and level of exertion. Limit children's outdoor physical activity on code orange, red, and purple days, especially for children diagnosed with asthma or other health problems.

- Check the NC Division of Air Quality website at www.ncair.org.
- Call the Air Awareness hotline at 1-888-RU4-NCAIR (1-888-784-6224).

Air temperatures can be health risks for some children. The *Child Care Weather Chart* from Iowa's Department of Health gives guidelines for safe outdoor play in a variety of temperatures: www.idph.state.ia.us/hcci/common/pdf/weatherwatch.pdf.

Safe Inside

Every child care center and family child care home should be well-maintained. In addition to the HVAC system, the electrical and water systems should be functioning properly. The building should be in good repair. To minimize the risk of exposure



to lead, buildings constructed before 1978 should be tested for lead if paint is peeling. Paint can leave chips or particulates on window sills, floors, and outside in the soil. If the building has copper plumbing soldered with lead, let tap water run for 15-30 seconds before using it for drinking or cooking.

Indoor Safety Checks should be conducted to remove hazards and reduce the risk of injuries.

- **Bulletin boards:** Push pins and staples should not be accessible to the children.
- **Choking hazards:** Small toys and small toy parts, and other small objects such as coins can be hazardous for children who put toys in their mouths. Objects smaller than 1 ¼ inches should not be accessible to young children.
- **Cords** (blinds, electrical, mobiles): Keep all cords out of children's reach to avoid strangulation hazards and decrease the risk of children pulling objects down onto themselves.
- **Diaper changing area:** The diaper changing table, and mat if used, should be clean and in good repair. The sides on the changing table should be 6 inches higher than the diaper changing surface. Keep diapering supplies out of children's reach and accessible to the early educator.
- **Electrical sockets:** Cover unused outlets or install electrical outlet safety covers.
- **Furniture:** All furniture should be in good repair, clean and age appropriate.
- **Lighting:** There should be enough light to easily supervise children. Natural lighting has a positive effect on mood.
- **Noise:** Children are stressed by too much of various types of unpleasant sounds. Children with dyslexia and hyperactivity and infants are at higher risk from noise pollution. Toys,



equipment, children at play, surfaces used for playing with toys, in addition to outdoor noises from traffic, factories, etc. contribute to noise pollution. Add sound absorbing materials such as curtains and area rugs in a noisy classroom. Modify room arrangements and schedules to reduce the noise level.

- **Other rooms in the building:** Rooms not intended for use by children should be inaccessible to the children at all times.
- **Plants:** Many common houseplants can be hazardous if the leaves are chewed or swallowed. Insure plants in the classroom are not poisonous. Heavy potted plants should be on the floor and hanging pots should be out of children's reach. 
- **Room arrangement:** Place heavy toys on lower shelves. Define centers clearly, avoid setting up a clear path for running, and check that children can easily be supervised. Set up safe sleep arrangements: store sleeps cots, mats and bedding to avoid contamination. Use best practice and space sleep places 36 inches apart.
- **Small appliances:** Keep small appliances and cords well out of children's reach.
- **Stairwells:** Keep stairwells well-lit and accessible to children only when they are supervised. Stairs should be free of clutter, non-slippery and have hand rails at appropriate heights for children and adults.
- **Storage:** Store personal items of children and staff to avoid contamination. Diaper bags and purses often contain items that can be hazardous to young children and should be stored out of children's reach. Hazardous chemicals, equipment, and medications should be stored in locked cabinets or behind locked doors. Store emergency medication within adult reach, out of children's reach, and five feet above the ground.
- **Tripping:** Clear floors of clutter. Area rugs should lay flat. Cords should not dangle. 
- **Water temperature:** Keep water temperatures between 80-110°F. Check at least weekly and more often if needed.

Safe Outside

In general the outside of the building, grounds, and fencing should be in good repair. Clear the area four feet beyond the fence to prevent rodents and other critters from living close to the outdoor learning environment. Safe drop off and pick-up procedures should be established and followed.



Outdoor safety checks should be conducted to remove potential hazards and reduce the risk of injury.

- **Absorbent Surfacing:** The depth of the loose fill surfacing under equipment should be checked daily. Rake, loosen, and add surfacing as needed. Surfacing should completely cover all fall zones to the appropriate depth. Concrete footings should be below ground and covered with surfacing. Remove loose objects from fall zones.
- **Equipment:** Check that equipment is free of broken or missing parts. Equipment should not have protruding bolts, rust, splinters, noticeable gaps, cracks or holes.
- **Landscaping:** Free the grounds from clutter. Grasses should

be mowed and standing water should be emptied. Arrangement of the outdoor learning area should be developmentally appropriate, allow for easy supervision of children, and be easily accessible to all children.

- **Shade:** Available shade should protect children from direct exposure to the sun. Tarps and shade roofs and their poles should be in good repair, free of rust, splinters and protrusions.
- **Storage:** Toys, moveable parts, and riding toys should be stored when not in use. Convenient storage increases the likelihood that materials will be used.
- **Toys/moveable parts/riding toys:** Items the children play with outdoors should be age-appropriate, in good repair, work well, free of sharp edges, clean, and replaced when worn or broken.
- **Trash:** Discard debris in lidded trash cans. Trash receptacles should be inaccessible to children. 
- **Walkways/Stairs/Access to the Road:** Children should not have access to the road. Keep walkways and stairs free of clutter and slick substances such as ice. Staff should be able to easily supervise children as they go outdoors and return indoors.

Safety in Family Child Care Homes

Operators of family child care homes (FCCHs) have additional safety issues they may face. For example, there may be a radiator in a room used by the children that must be inaccessible to the children. Tools and sharp objects such as household knives, paint cans, firearms and other weapons, must be inaccessible to children in FCCHs. NebGuide, from the University of Nebraska, published *Child Care Environment: Room-by-Room Safety Checklist*, a comprehensive tool that is especially useful for family child care homes. It is available at: <http://ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1643/build/g1643.pdf>.

Web Resources

- **Caring For Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards, 3rd edition:** www.nrckids.org/CFOC3/
- **Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC):** www.cpsc.gov
- **Indoor Air Quality: Schools:** <http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/air/schools.html>
- **Lead Prevention:** www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/Children_Health/Lead/lead.html
- **NC Child Care Rules:** www.nrckids.org/STATES/NC/northcarolina.htm
- **Poisonous Plant of North Carolina:** www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/poison/poison.htm

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Holiday Toy Safety

The winter holidays are a great time to do an overall safety check on toys in early care and education centers and family child care homes. Toys become hazardous when they put children at risk for choking, tripping, falling, or other type of injury. Make sure that:



- Toys are appropriate to the developmental ages of the children.

- Infants, toddlers and children who put objects in their mouths do not play with objects smaller than 1¾ inches in diameter, or toys with small parts.

- Toys are put away when not being used, so that children do not trip and fall.

- Toys are in good repair and do not have sharp edges or points, loose parts or screws, or places where skin and fingers get pinched.

- Toys can be easily washed and sanitized, such as machine-washable stuffed animals.



- Children wear appropriately sized helmets when riding tricycles, scooters and other riding toys.

- Riding toys, action toys and games match the size and skill level of the children.

- Children do not play with plastic bags, balloons, latex gloves, or any items with small batteries.

- Infant cribs do not have bedding, pillows and other items in them.

- Decorations or toys are not strung across or above cribs.

When shopping for a new toy, look for sturdy construction. Consider the skill levels and interests of the children, as well the play value. Read the label. Check the age recommendations, safety advice, and instructions for use.



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National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Early Education. "Holiday Safety Tips." Retrieved December 3, 2012 from <http://nrckids.org/>

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. "List of Top Holiday Safety Tips Released." Retrieved December 4 2012 from www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerel/prhtml07/07032.html

December is

5: Bird Day



Safe Toys and Gifts Month

25: National Pre-school Fitness Day

Root Vegetables and Exotic Fruits Month



World Human Rights Month

February is

American Heart Month

January is

National Children's Dental Health Month



National Blood Donor Month

1: National Wear Red Day

National Birth Defects Prevention Month

3 - 9: Children's Authors and Illustrators Week

20-26: Healthy Weight Week



11-17: Random Acts of Kindness Week

Bulletin Board

CPSC Crib Regulations



By December 29, 2012, the cribs in child care centers and homes must comply with the Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC) crib safety standards. The regulations ban drop-side rails, call for improved hardware, and require strict testing. Cribs sold before June 28, 2011 are not likely to meet the new safety standards. Manufacturers are required to provide the retailers with certification that their cribs have been tested and comply with the new standards. Play yards must also meet new CPSC standards issued June 29, 2012. For more information on crib and play yard standards visit www.cpsc.gov/info/cribs.

Safe Sleep

While taking time to ensure crib safety for infants, review the Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) risk factors and the facility's Safe Sleep Policy. Recommit to using safe sleep practices that provide infants with safe sleep environments. While taking time to ensure crib safety for infants, review the Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) risk factors and the facility's Safe Sleep Policy. Recommit to using safe sleep practices that provide infants with safe sleep environments.



Follow these guidelines until children are at least one year old. Make sure infants:

- ✓ are placed on their backs to sleep
- ✓ sleep alone in a crib or sleep place with a firm mattress and a fitted sheet sleep without blankets, pillows or any extra items in the crib
- ✓ are not overheated
 - put less than three layers of clothing on infants
 - keep room temperature 68-75°F

The revised Infant Toddler Safe Sleep and SIDS Risk Reduction in Child Care (ITS-SIDS) course has a new look and additional information on reducing the risk of SIDS and other infant deaths. It also includes information on breastfeeding and pacifier use, which are protective factors against SIDS.



Safety Begins at Home

From infancy on, families are concerned about children's safety. Some hazards are obvious – such as an open fire place or a toy truck lying in the driveway. A loose stairway railing, a blanket in the crib, and an accessible outdoor socket are examples of hazards that are harder to identify. Supervision and organization are the first steps to creating safe indoor and outdoor environments.

Supervision is the best prevention!

Supervising young children requires being able to see and hear the children. Provide guidance and respond quickly if a child explores something hazardous or behaves in an unsafe way. Observe at all times, and interact with children frequently during play.

Children who are developmentally ready can help supervise a younger child for brief periods of time. An adult should be nearby and ready to respond to a call for help.



Easy Solutions for Common Hazards

- Secure places such as open windows, loose screens and railings to prevent falls.
- Eliminate access to cords on lamps, small appliances, and window blinds.
- Cover indoor and outdoor electrical sockets not in use.
- Store hazardous products such as plastic bags, cleaning supplies, lawn and automotive products, out of children's reach.
- Keep medication in a locked and secure location. Dispose of expired medication properly.
- Drain water from bathtubs and close lids on toilets. Empty wading pools and other containers with standing water.
- Install gates at the top and bottom of stairs as well as at doorways to keep children in safe areas.
- Store lighters, matches and candles out of children's reach. Provide secure barriers to fireplaces and woodstoves.
- Use back burners and turn saucepan and skillet handles towards the back of the stove.
- Replace batteries on smoke detectors and carbon dioxide (CO) alarms every six months.



- Keep firearms out of the home to prevent injury or death from guns. When firearms are present, store them unloaded in a locked place separate from the ammunition. Store ammunition in a locked place. For more information on gun safety visit: www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/all-around/pages/Gun-Safety-Keeping-Children-Safe.aspx
- Keep small objects such as coins, marbles, and safety pins, as well as toys that have small parts that could be swallowed or present a choking hazard, out of the reach of children under three years of age.
- Keep play equipment free of splinters and strangulation hazards.
- Define outdoor play spaces with boundaries such as fences or hedges.
- Check that safety equipment such as bicycle helmets and car seats are in good repair and function properly.



Infants and Toddlers Use the "hands-and-knees" test to observe the world from a young child's point of view. Move all around the house and yard on hands and knees. Identify and remove potential hazards.

Refer to the following checklists for more detailed guidance.

- Childproofing Cut and Carry Checklist
http://kidshealth.org/parent/misc/childproofing_cutout.html
- Household Safety Checklist
http://kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/home/household_checklist.html

Touch and Taste Infants, toddlers and young children explore through touch and taste. Many place fingers and toys in their mouths. This exploration can lead to the transfer of contaminated dust and other substances into their bodies. Young children spend time on the floor where dust and many air pollutants settle. Their small bodies and high metabolisms place them at greater risk from pesticides, second-hand smoke and other pollution.

Safe approaches to pest control and cleaning protect children in and around the home by reducing exposure to unsafe pollutants. Visit www.ToxicFreeNC.org for Fact Sheets on safe alternatives.



Hoops ~ Circles of Fun!



Hand a child a hoop and see what happens. Expect different results depending on their developmental stage.

Hoops can be used for inside as well as outside play. They bring a smile to faces of all ages. Using hoops builds early motor skills, coordination and cooperation. Children can play with hoops as soon as they start crawling. Preschoolers gain agility and strengthen teamwork. School-aged children can add strategy and science skills to their hooping. Everyone gets a work out!

Exploring Hoops Place hoops on the ground indoors or outdoors. Let infants and toddlers discover and explore. Non-mobile infants can place objects inside, outside, under or through the hoop. Hoops can be touched, smelled, dragged, pushed, and lifted. Demonstrate simple activities. Roll the hoop along the ground or floor. Lift it over a toy. Stand it up so young children can crawl through. Toddlers and preschoolers can throw bean bags through the hoop. Hold the hoop parallel to the ground and about two feet off the ground so children can toss a ball through it. Increase the challenge by raising the hoop higher or asking children to stand farther away.

Circle Round the Waist Children and adults start "hooping" by circling the hoop around their waist while rocking front and back on their feet. When they feel ready, they release their hands and keep the hoop circling around the waist by the movement of their bodies. Give it a try. Start by holding the hoop against the back of the waist. Twist the upper body toward one side, unwind and fling the hoop around the waist. Keep it going by rocking the waist and hips.

Jump, Skip, Hop Place three to eight hula hoops in a row on the floor. Have the children jump from hoop to hoop all the way to the end. Next try skipping, and then hopping. Make a large circle of hoops when children want to keep going round and round!

Thread the Needle School-aged children can join hands with five or six other children and form a circle. Hang a hoop from one child's arm. The child with the hoop starts by climbing through the hoop and passing it to the next child without letting go of their neighbor's hand. Pass the hoop around the circle.

Share the Fun--Keep it Going Child care health consultant (CCHC) Terri Walls has been encouraging *hooping* in childcare centers, family child care homes and related programs throughout her community. With plenty of adult supervision and the right materials, children can help make their own hoops as part of a "make and take" workshop. For directions on how to make a hula hoop visit www.jasonunbound.com/hoops.html. Terri recommends having child and adult size hoops ready to use when children and staff need a break or a fun exercise. For community hooping ideas visit www.kidtribe.com.

Did you know?

In ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt, children played with hoops made from vines.

For Native Americans hoop dancing is a way of telling stories. Using many small hoops, which represent the circle of life, dancers transform themselves into eagles, snakes, coyotes and other animals.

Hoops have been made of bamboo, rattan, willow, wood, grasses or vines.



The plastic "hula hoop", whose name was inspired by the Hawaiian hula dance, became popular in the late 1950's.



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Work Notes, Fit 4 Fun Fitness. Hula Hoop. Retrieved September 12, 2012 from www.worknotes.com/IL/Chicago/Fit4FunKidsFitness/hf2.aspx Hula Hoop

Grape, Grape, Raisin!



Chant the poem while introducing bite-size pieces of grapes and raisins to older infants or toddlers. Eating finger foods develops fine motor skills and is an enjoyable step toward independence.

Choking Warning: Serve grapes to children less than 4 years of age in a form they can manage. Cut food for infants into pieces ¼ inch or smaller. Toddlers should eat pieces ½ inch or smaller. Supervise infants and toddlers at all times while they eat.

Colors of grapes

Grapes range in color from green and brownish to red and purple. Add a variety of grapes to the science center for children to study under magnifiers. Chart the colors they identify. When finished, move the grapes to the art center. Offer yellow and blue paint at one easel. At another, offer red and blue. Marvel at how two colors mix together to make a new one.



Grape to Raisin

Let children discover how juicy grapes turn into dried-up raisins.

- Cover a wire rack with a paper towel.
- Wash seedless, sweet grapes in cold water to clean them.
- Place individual grapes on the paper towel. Cover them with another paper towel.
- Place the grapes outside in the sun. Weight down the paper towels to keep them from blowing away.

Check the grapes daily and encourage children to sketch how they look. When did the grapes become raisins? What happened? Watch Sesame Street's *Snacks on Parade (Raisins)*: www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-AeWjxZ-1I.

Grape, grape
Lying in the sun
You must be hot
And you're not having fun.

Grape, grape
Where did you go?
You once were green
But not anymore.

Grape, grape
With smooth green skin
You now have wrinkles,
Oh—you're a black raisin!



Grape, Grape, Raisin!

This game is played like "Duck, Duck, Goose", except the children will say "Grape, Grape, Raisin".

1. Have children sit in a circle facing each other.
2. One child is "it" and walks around the circle. He taps each child gently on the head and says "grape."
3. When the tapper says "raisin," the child whose head was just touched jumps up and chases the tapper around the circle.
4. The tapper tries to get all the way back to the raisin's spot and sit down without getting tagged.

- ☺ If the tapper succeeds, the raisin then becomes the new tapper.
- ☹ If the raisin catches the tapper, the tapper remains "it" and the game continues.

Fact's about Grapes



- Grapes grow on vines in clusters. Grapes contain nutrients like Vitamins K and C, fiber, iron and calcium.
- 4 ½ pounds of fresh grapes make 1 pound of raisins.
- Muscadine grapes, native to the Southeastern United States, have been cultivated for more than 400 years. Native Americans preserved Muscadines as dried fruit long before Europeans inhabited this continent.
- Scuppernon is a large variety of Muscadine. This grape was discovered near the Scuppernon River that flows through Tyrell and Washington Counties in Eastern North Carolina. The Scuppernon grape is the official state fruit of NC. Find out more at: www.statesymbolsusa.org/North_Carolina/fruit_scuppernongrape.html



Children's Books on Grapes & Raisins

Fruits

by Sara Anderson 2007



Go, Go, Grapes!: A Fruit Chant
by April Pulley Sayre 2012



Grapes to Raisins (Welcome Books: How Things Are Made)
by Inez Snyder 2005



Lousy Rotten Stinkin' Grapes
by Margie Palatini 2009



🍷 Infant/Toddler 📖 Preschool – School-age

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Network for a Healthy California - Merced County Office of Education. *Harvest of the Month Preschool Activity Packet*. Retrieved October 1, 2012 from http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/nut/LACOLLAB_Files/documents/HOTM/Cycle%2020December-Dried%20Fruits/2008_12%20Dried%20Fruit%20Preschool%20Packet.pdf

Using Songs to Teach Nutrition, A List of Songs for Use in the Preschool Classroom. Retrieved September 27, 2012 from www.healthypreschoolers.com/Websites/healthypreschoolers/Images/Song%20List%20Final.pdf



POSTMASTER: Please deliver as soon as possible – time dated material enclosed

Ask the Resource Center

Q: *I use latex gloves in my childcare center, and I think I may have an allergy to them. What do I need to know?*

A: If you think you have a latex allergy, your first step should be to contact your health care professional. Anyone can develop an allergy to the proteins in latex rubber. Symptoms range from mild sneezing to anaphylactic shock and are influenced by the severity of the allergy and the amount of exposure. Wearing latex gloves may cause cracks, bumps, sores or redness on the hands 12-36 hours after contact. A rise in latex allergy has occurred in childcare workers wearing latex gloves for routine diaper changes and to avoid exposure to blood borne pathogens.



Talk to your pharmacist or supply store to make sure the disposable, non-latex gloves you use meet Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines. You want disposal gloves that protect against viruses like Hepatitis B and C, or HIV.



Medical grade non-latex gloves can be expensive, so consider buying them in bulk. Vinyl and polyvinyl chloride gloves do not contain latex, and can be used in early care and education settings when blood is not involved. Keep in mind that some gloves have the word "hypoallergenic" written on the box, but this does not mean "latex-free."

When diagnosed with a latex allergy, consult with an allergist about:

- proper use of all medications, including the Epi pen, prescribed for severe reactions
- foods and plants that have similar proteins to natural rubber and may cause allergic reactions
- "hidden" latex on food prepared with latex gloves

You will have to avoid all natural rubber latex products. This includes some toys, pacifiers, diapers and baby bottles. In places where powdered latex gloves are used frequently, the air may contain latex particles. Let medical and dental providers know about your allergy status to prevent accidental contact.

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HEALTH BULLETIN

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