



Creating a Healthy Child Care Environment

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It seems like every day you hear about another environmental hazard to worry about. Keeping the children in your care safe from all these hazards can feel like an overwhelming task.

But it's really not that hard! Remember:

- There are many resources and guides to help – you don't need a degree in chemistry to figure it out.
- You don't have to do everything at once. Do a few easy things to start with, then do a few more.

The stakes for the kids are high. Some common environmental hazards can trigger immediate problems, like asthma attacks and allergies. Children are also especially vulnerable to long-term hazards such as cancer, nerve or hormonal disruption, and reproductive problems, partly because their bodies are still developing and partly because they take in more hazards from the environment. Children breathe faster, taking in more toxins from the air. They have more skin for their body weight, taking in harmful substances through the skin. And they are more likely to take in toxins by putting objects or hands in their mouths.

Here are some key steps you can take to create and maintain a healthy environment.



PESTICIDES

Pesticides are poisons – that's the point.

- Try to avoid the need for pesticides with prevention: Clean thoroughly, keep food and garbage in closed containers, fill in cracks where insects could enter.
- Try non-toxic treatments first: traps, hand weeding, cleaning.
- If you do use pesticides, read labels, follow precautions, and ventilate the area with fans and open windows and doors.
- Clean and ventilate thoroughly after pesticide use.

CLEANING PRODUCTS

Harsh ingredients in cleaners can be harmful; products labeled “disinfectants,” “sanitizers,” or “antibacterial” are pesticides.

- Give children ordinary soap, not antibacterial products, for washing.
- Read labels and check ingredients at www.epa.gov/dfe, www.greenseal.org, or www.ecologo.org.
- Avoid products labeled “danger” or “poison.” Follow directions for use.
- Try making your own cleaners from ordinary household ingredients. Some recipes at: http://www.acgov.org/documents/Green_Cleaning_Recipes.pdf
- Store all cleaners in labeled, closed containers out of the reach of children.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Alameda County Early Care and Education Planning Council has a list of Green Child Care Resources on its website.

www.acgov.org/childcare/

Green Care for Children

www.greencareforchildren.org

EcoHealthy Child Care

www.cehn.org/our-work/eco-healthy-child-care/

California Child Care Health Program,

www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org

AIR QUALITY

Pollutants in the air can trigger asthma or other immediate symptoms and create a range of long-term health problems.

- Control dust by vacuuming frequently, avoiding wall-to-wall carpets if possible, and choosing easy-to-clean surfaces.
- Prevent mold and mildew with frequent cleaning, and, if necessary, dehumidifiers.
- Make sure your space is well ventilated.
- Avoid strong smells, even if they're natural – they can trigger asthma attacks.
- Test for radon, a colorless, odorless gas that causes lung cancer. Information and test kits (\$7) at www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/environhealth/Pages/Radon.aspx.
- Use interior and exterior paints that are low in “volatile organic compounds” (VOCs).



PLASTICS

Some kinds of plastic contain ingredients that cause cancer, birth defects, and hormonal problems, including early puberty.

- Check the little recycling numbers and avoid plastic with numbers 3, 6, and 7.
- Never heat any kind of plastic in the microwave, especially in contact with food.
- Make sure soft plastic items – toys, teething rings, crib bumpers, rest mats – are labeled free of **phthalates**, harmful chemicals recently banned in children's products in California.
- Make sure hard plastic items – baby bottles, sippy cups, etc. – are labeled free of **BPA** (bisphenol-A). A new California law bans BPA in children's products but many already manufactured are still in use.
- Avoid Styrofoam and plastic utensils – they contain **styrene**.
- Minimize the use of canned foods – most cans are lined with BPA.
- Choose plastic toys made with polypropylene or polyethylene.

ART SUPPLIES

Some art supplies contain toxic ingredients

- Read labels and check ingredients and products for safety at the Art and Creative Materials Institute, www.acminet.org.
- Make sure the art area is well ventilated.
- Have children wash hands after using art materials.
- Avoid:
 - powdered materials with dust children could inhale.
 - permanent or scented markers.
 - instant papier-mâché.
 - paint or glue containing oil or lead.

FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT

- Some playground equipment is made with “treated wood,” which contains arsenic. Usually it has little symmetrical holes in the surface. Learn more at www.safe2play.org/documents.html
- Have children wash their hands after using playground equipment.
- New furniture is often treated with cancer-causing flame-retardants or formaldehyde. Items stuffed with polyester, down, wool, or cotton are less likely to contain these toxins.
- Make sure foam is intact and covered.
- Try to find solid wood furniture – plywood contains formaldehyde.

LEAD

You know that lead is very dangerous for children, causing serious learning and emotional problems. The main sources of lead poisoning for children are:

- peeling paint, in buildings built before 1978.
- lead in water from old pipes.
- pottery that is old or made in a different country.
- some traditional home remedies.

For information on removing lead hazards and on Alameda County's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, see www.achhd.org