



Office of Children and Family Services

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

SHEILA J. POOLE
Acting Commissioner

December, 2017



Dear Provider:

The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) wishes you a happy and safe holiday season! Safe? Yes, this holiday season I want to stress health and safety. As a day care provider, you can take steps to keep the children in your care safe and healthy—and ready to enjoy the holidays. I am sending this letter to provide you with valuable tips and information to do just that. A proactive approach to safety is a perfect gift to the children in your care and their families.

Look for Hazards

As children are much smaller than adults, it is easy to overlook hazards which may be present to children. Providers should be aware of the children's environments. This can be done by getting down low and looking from a child's perspective to see if any dangers exist in the child care space. Dangers may include low hanging holiday decorations, electrical cords, tip-over hazards, small toys that may be a choking hazard, etc.

Holiday Decorations

Holiday decorations are nice to look at, but to small children they are tempting and can be dangerous. The twinkling lights, sparkly glass bulbs, and pretty plants are all temptations to little ones. When decorating this holiday season, be mindful of small children and be sure to:

- place decorations, especially glass, up high, out of reach of children;
- keep choking hazards out of reach;
- keep your means of egress (exits) and all pathways clear, especially when moving furniture to make room for a Christmas tree or dining table;
- make sure there is sufficient room for children to nap;
- firmly set Christmas trees in sturdy bases to avoid tipping hazards; and
- remember to water trees daily - a dry tree can pose a fire hazard.

Tip-Over Hazards



Falling objects are another common cause of injury to children. Young children are often tempted to reach above their heads and pull objects down from shelves or bookcases. Televisions that are not secured, hot pots, plants, and other heavy objects can injure children. Placing heavy objects on lower shelves or securing them in position prevents these objects from falling on top of small children. Any items not intended for children should be inaccessible or placed in a room where children do not have access. Supervising children closely prevents many injuries.

In the Event of an Emergency, Call 911

Unfortunately, emergencies can happen in our day-to-day lives. Sometimes those emergencies involve children in care. It is extremely important to seek out help when needed and never delay in obtaining emergency assistance for a child. By calling **911**, you are able to access prompt assistance from trained professionals. If an emergency occurs involving a child in your care, follow these steps:

- Call 911.
- Follow your Health Care Plan and any Individual Health Care Plan for the child.
- Make sure the CPR and First Aid certified person is assisting.
- Make sure other children in care are safe and keep them, and yourself, calm.
- Contact the child's parent.
- Contact OCFS to report the incident.

Sometimes there may be hesitation in calling 911 as you may feel a situation may not warrant the call. However, 911 operators are trained to ask appropriate questions to determine the level of response needed for any call they receive. Some situations that may prompt the calling of 911 are listed below. **Keep in mind this list is not all inclusive.** These are examples of situations where 911 must be called. With children, it is always best to err on the side of caution.

Call 911 if...

- any injury or illness requires more than simple first aid;
- a child sustains a serious injury;
- a child is in respiratory distress, unable to breathe/has labored breathing;
- a child has lost consciousness;
- you suspect a child has internal injuries or injuries to the neck/spine;
- a child has uncontrollable bleeding;
- a child has a seizure;
- a child has a rapid rise in temperature;
- a child is choking;
- a child has an allergic reaction or an epi-pen is utilized;
- signs of anaphylactic shock;
- a child falls, has a head injury;
- vomiting after an injury, especially injury to the head;
- a child is dehydrated or shows signs of dehydration;
- a child is burned;
- a child's location is unknown; and if
- a child has ingested a poisonous substance or ingested a food/substance he/she is allergic to.



Allergic Reactions and Anaphylaxis

Enjoying parties, festivities and trying new foods are part of the holidays. But be aware of:



- foods offered to children in your child care program;
- identified food allergies in children; and
- any reaction to food in children who have not been known to have allergies.

Food allergy reactions vary from person to person. Some can be mild, such as hives on the skin. Others can be more severe and result in a serious allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis. This is a potentially life-threatening reaction. Reactions can happen within a few minutes or up to a few hours after contact with the food. Follow your health care plan and any individual health care plans for children in your care.

Don't delay. In a medical emergency, call 911!

Heating Systems



For safety reasons, it is suggested that you check your heating system before the winter season begins.

- It is recommended that you have your heating system checked annually by a professional. Equipment in disrepair can cause deadly carbon monoxide to build up in your home. Carbon monoxide is odorless, tasteless and colorless, and can be fatal.
- Make sure you check your smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors regularly to ensure they are working properly and change the batteries as needed.
- Always check to make sure outdoor vents are clear of snow and debris.
- If bad weather causes a power outage in your area, be sure to follow your emergency plan.
- Do not use candles.
- If a fire does break out in your home, follow your emergency plan. Practicing your emergency plan allows for children to become more familiar with what to do in the event of a real emergency.

Prepare for the Weather and Outside Play



A fresh coat of snow during the holiday season is pretty, but can also be dangerous. Remember to check that:

- areas of egress are clear of snow and ice to avoid injuries from slips and falls;
- children are dressed appropriately for the weather;
- children refrain from throwing snow/ice at others to avoid injury;
- children don't create snow forts or tunnels, as they can collapse and trap children;
- snow and ice are not falling from roofs; and
- children stay away from sources of water or thin ice on swimming pools, ponds, lakes, or other water hazards that pose a risk of drowning or injury.
- playground equipment is suitable for winter play and the soft surfacing is NOT frozen.

Alcohol Consumption

- Be sure to keep alcoholic beverages out of the reach of children.
- If you suspect a parent/guardian who arrives at your program to pick up a child may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and you are incapable of preventing their exit, contact 911 immediately.
- Consumption of, or being under the influence of alcohol by any day care staff person, caregiver or volunteer is prohibited during child day care hours.

Transportation

Traveling during the holidays can be hectic, especially when children are involved. The best way to avoid travel headaches is by being prepared.

- Be mindful of weather reports and avoid traveling during poor weather conditions.
- Make sure your vehicle is in good repair and winterized.
- Prepare for emergencies by packing a "winter survival kit" which could include blankets, extra warm clothes, food/water, etc.
- Most importantly, always make sure children are properly seated in child safety seats, booster seats, or seat belts according to their height, weight, and age.

NY-Alert

NY-Alert is New York State's all hazard and notification system that allows individuals from the general public the option of choosing to receive automatic notifications in the case of statewide weather events, road closures in your area, missing persons reports known as Amber Alerts or Silver Alerts or other emergency situations such as hazardous material spills. **NY-Alert is free and subscription based.** You can choose how you want to

receive notifications, whether by cell phone, email, etc. You may also select the type of notifications and the geographical areas for which you receive notices. To enroll via the internet, go to: <https://www.nyalert.gov/>. If you do not have access to the internet, you may also sign up for NY-Alert by calling 1-888-697-6972.

Cold and Flu Season

Unfortunately, winter brings the cold and flu season. A great way to prevent seasonal flu is to get a yearly flu vaccine. The New York State Department of Health recommends that all people six months of age and older get vaccinated against seasonal influenza as soon as the vaccine is available.



Child care programs are required to post influenza educational material in plain view so that that families are informed and know the benefits of a flu shot. The seasonal flu guide for parents and additional resources is enclosed and can be found at the following link:

http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/influenza/seasonal/childhood_adolescent/.

To help prevent the spread of germs, children and child care staff should be reminded to wash their hands often with soap and running water.

Beware of Organizations Offering to Supply Substitute Services

It has come to the attention of OCFS that there are organizations reaching out to child care programs offering to supply substitute teachers and caregivers when they are unexpectedly needed for the supervision of children in their programs in order to comply with staffing ratio requirements. Please be advised that this is not a permissible option in any licensed or registered child care program, because these substitutes are not being screened in accordance with the provisions of Social Services Law and child care regulations. The required screening by the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment, Vulnerable Persons Central Register-Staff Exclusion List (SEL) and Division of Criminal Justice Services (fingerprinting) is only permitted to be conducted by OCFS staff or OCFS agents; or a director of a day care center or school age child care program, as applicable in the OCFS child care regulations. In addition, such screenings must only be conducted on employees and volunteers of the child care program, as specified in law, regulation and policy. Since these outside organizations do not have the authority to complete the required screenings for child care programs, these persons may not count in ratio or be left unsupervised with children in care. If you need additional clarification, we suggest that you contact your licensing/registration office, as engaging in this practice will place your program out of compliance.

Manage Stress

You are the most important source of safety to the children in your care!

So be sure to take care of yourself. Get the rest, nutrition, and exercise you need this holiday season. Thank you for all you do to keep the children of New York safe. I wish you and your family a safe and happy holiday time and best wishes for the new year.



Sincerely,



Janice M. Molnar, Ph.D.
Deputy Commissioner
Division of Child Care Services

Si necesita leer esta carta en español, visite el portal de la División de Servicios de Cuidado Infantil:
<http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/childcare/letters.asp>. Si no tiene acceso a la Red o Internet, contacte al encargado de licencias o registros para recibir ayuda.