



Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education

Planning. Guidance. Protection.



Working together to protect children's health

Florida is working to make sure that early care and education (ECE) programs are located in safe places – so that children aren't exposed to dangerous chemicals during their care. Our goal is to work with professionals in public health, community planning, zoning, licensing, environmental protection, early care and education, and other fields to create safe practices in our communities.

Understanding the problem

ECE programs may be located in places where children and staff can come in contact with dangerous chemicals even if they meet current state licensing regulations. As a result, a new ECE program might open in a contaminated industrial building that was never cleaned up, or next door to a dry cleaner using harmful chemicals. This can put staff and especially children – who are more sensitive to the effects of chemicals because they're still growing – at risk of health problems. In some cases, these health effects may be irreversible.

How Florida is helping

The Florida Department of Health is developing a program that encourages better choices about where to locate ECE facilities. We are adopting practices and supporting policies that will make sure ECE programs are located in facilities where children won't be exposed to dangerous chemicals. We are helping professionals who make ECE siting decisions learn how to evaluate a site for an ECE program by considering if:

- ▶ Harmful chemicals were ever used, made, or dumped at the site
- ▶ Businesses are using harmful chemicals near the site
- ▶ The site is a risk for naturally occurring contaminants like radon
- ▶ The drinking water is unsafe

The Florida ECE program is designed to complement and not replace state and local regulations. The program is designed so that evaluating environmental health concerns to licensing requirements doesn't necessarily require additional funding or staff.

In Florida, 9,433 licensed ECE programs serve children for an average of 36 hours per week.

Protect children in child care centers from chemicals like:

- ▶ Arsenic
- ▶ Lead
- ▶ Pesticides
- ▶ Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)

When we work together, we can protect children from unwanted chemical exposures.

Why is it important to us?

In 2015, the Florida Department Health investigated a case of mercury poisoning in a 3-year-old boy in Hillsborough County. Tests found mercury levels 90 times the safe level in a home day care that he attended.

The problem: Kids were playing with an antique blood pressure cuff in the home day care.

The solution: The Florida Department of Health developed a fact sheet – Liquid Mercury Health Notice – that the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) electronically distributed to over 10,000 child care centers. In addition, DCF sent 1,800 hard copies in a separate mailing.



Learn more

- Check out the [Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education](https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/safeplacesforece/) resources. You'll find fact sheets, infographics, videos, a copy of our complete guidelines, and more helpful resources.
- See [Caring for our Children Basics](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/caring-for-our-children-basics) here: [acf.hhs.gov/ecd/caring-for-our-children-basics](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/caring-for-our-children-basics)
- Contact: PHToxicology@FLHealth.gov or Toll-Free at 1-877-798-2771
- More information about us: [HazWaste.FloridaHealth.gov](https://www.hazwaste.floridahealth.gov)



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