

Healthy Child Care Iowa Fact Sheet

Outdoor Physical Activity

Healthy Child Care Iowa (HCCI) works to improve the quality of health and safety in Early Care and Education (ECE) programs serving infants, toddlers, preschoolers, school-aged children and their families. The items included in fact sheets were identified recent findings on the *Health and Safety Checklist for Early Care and Education Programs*.

Benefits of Outdoor Physical Activity

Children love spending time outside. There are many benefits of outdoor physical activity.

More engaged in learning - Playing outside promotes curiosity, creativity and critical thinking and focus. Physical activity improves the cognitive functions of memory, executive function, processing speed and attention. Children who spent more time in nature exploration have been shown to have improved learning outcomes.

Physically healthier - Children play harder outdoors than indoors. Children who are physically active have higher levels of cardiorespiratory fitness, stronger muscles and bones and typically have lower body fat.

Mentally healthier - Stress and depression are lower for all people who spend time in nature and are physically active.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children have time for physical activity each day. Here's how much they need:

- ▶ Infants need at least 30 minutes of “tummy time” and other interactive play, spread throughout each day.
- ▶ Toddlers should get at least 3 hours of physical activity.
- ▶ Preschoolers 3-5 years old need at least 3 hours of physical activity, with 1 hour being moderate to vigorous activity.
- ▶ Children 6 years and older need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity both free play and organized sports. This should include muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening activities at least 3 days a week.

Improving strength doesn't have to mean lifting weights. Children can do push-ups, stomach crunches, pull-ups, and other exercises to help tone and strengthen muscles. Muscle strengthening and aerobic exercises like running, jumping, and hopping, also help build strong bones.

Adult-led Physical Activity

Child care providers should provide adult-led physical activity every day. Structured adult-led activities have been shown to produce higher levels of physical activity in young children. Plus, when children see their caregivers enjoying physical activity, they want to try it, too. Adult-led activities:

- ▶ Can be short in duration like music and movement, follow-the-leader, tag.
- ▶ Can be longer and more structured activities like games, obstacle course and exercises.
- ▶ Should be offered at least 2 or more times during the child care day.

Child Care Outdoor Playground Injuries

Iowa child care injury data has shown that injuries on the playground are often the result of lack of supervision and falls to unsafe surfaces.

- ▶ Falls from playground equipment that lacks proper fall surfacing is the leading cause of serious injuries.
- ▶ Injuries also occur from lack of supervision of children playing on equipment that is not appropriate to their age, strength and ability or not using the equipment correctly.

Playground fall injuries can be avoided by following Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) national standards for protective fall surfacing. Shock-absorbing, protective fall surfacing must be under and around all elevated playground equipment.

- ▶ There are two options available for fall surfacing: unitary and loose-fill materials.
- ▶ Concrete, asphalt, or other hard surfaces like grass or dirt should never be directly under playground equipment.
- ▶ Protective fall surfacing must be tested and rated as appropriate for the height of the playground equipment.

Playground injuries can be avoided by using “active supervision”

- ▶ Stay alert and anticipate risky behavior
- ▶ Be positioned to see and hear children
- ▶ Scan and count children name-to-face
- ▶ Use “touch supervision” when younger children are around water; be close enough to always reach the child

For more information on outdoor physical activity and playground safety:

- ▶ NEMOURS Kids and Exercise <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/exercise.html>
- ▶ National Program for Play Area Safety (NPPAS) <https://playgroundsafety.org/>

References:

AAP Policy: Physical Activity <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/fitness/Pages/Making-Fitness-a-Way-of-Life.aspx>

Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd ed. <https://odphp.health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/physical-activity-guidelines/current-guidelines>