Chapter 6: Safe Environments

Table of Contents

- Animals at child care centres
- Gardening at child care centres
- Tobacco, Vapour and Smoke

Animals in Child Care Centres

Animals and pets play an important role in children's education and well-being, but they may also pose infection control risks. Child care centers ensure children remain safe and healthy if pets will be present in the centre. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Recommendations for the Management of Animals in Child Care Settings, 2018, provides detailed advice for child care centres.

As per Ministry guidance, some animals are not recommended for child care centres:

- Stray animals with unknown health and vaccination history
- Ill animals or animals under medical treatment
- Young animals (e.g. puppies and kittens less than one year old)
- Animals fed raw / dehydrated foods, chews, or treats of animal origin within the past 90 days
- Animals from shelters or pounds (within six months)
- Birthing or pregnant animals
- Inherently dangerous animals (e.g. lynx, lions, bears, cougars, tigers)
- Predatory birds (e.g. hawks, eagles, owls)
- Venomous or toxin-producing animals (e.g. spiders, insects, reptiles, amphibians)
- Aggressive animals (e.g. animals that have demonstrated aggressive behavior in the past)
- Animals in estrus (i.e. animals in heat)
- Exotic animals (e.g. hedgehogs, chinchillas); non-human primates (e.g. monkeys, lemurs)
- Wild animals (e.g. squirrels, chipmunks)
- Rabies reservoir species (i.e. bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes)

In addition to the above, certain animals are not recommended for child care centres with children less than 5 years of age:

- Reptiles (e.g. turtles, snakes and lizards such as bearded dragons and geckos)
- Amphibians (e.g. frogs, toads, salamanders)
- Live poultry (e.g. chicks, ducklings, goslings), including hatchery equipment
- Ferrets
- Farm animals (e.g. calves, goats, sheep)

Requirements for Animal Presence in Child Care Centres

- Facilities should have a policy or procedure for pets or animals, including who is responsible for feeding and caring for the animal(s), the level of interaction permitted between children and animals, and general infection prevention and control measures
- Domestic dogs and cats must have up-to-date rabies immunizations, and records must be available on site, as required by Ontario Regulation 567
- Staff and children must wash their hands immediately after handling animals, animal food or animal equipment
- Animals must be kept away from food storage and preparation areas to prevent contamination

Consult with a public health inspector before arranging for animals to be present on-site at the child care centre.

Animal Bites and Scratches

If a child or staff member is bitten or scratched by an animal at a child care centre, wash the wound with soap and running water for 15 minutes, and apply an antiseptic with an NPN or DIN number. Seek medical attention, if necessary, and report the incident to Public Health as soon as possible.

Contact Niagara Region Public Health by phone at 905 688 8248, ext. 7590, or by email: **inspect@niagararegion.ca**

Gardening at Child Care Centres

Choosing a location

Choosing the right location for your garden is very important. To prevent contamination of soil and produce, avoid building a garden nearby:

- Waste storage areas
- Areas prone to flooding
- Septic systems
- Parking lots
- Building the garden

If you decide to build a raised garden, make sure to use safe materials. You can contaminate the soil if you use chemically treated materials, such as pressure-treated lumber and railway ties.

Planting

Once you pick the right location and are ready to plant, follow these tips for a safe, healthy garden:

- Start with clean soil
- If you decide to use fertilizer, use only store-bought fertilizer and follow the manufacturer's instructions
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after gardening
- Change and wash your clothes if they become dirty to prevent contamination of other areas
- Avoid using raw manure and compost



Keeping pests away

Pests, such as rabbits, deer and rodents, can impact the health and productivity of your garden.

- Maintain the area surrounding your garden
- Remove rotting fruits and vegetables
- Pull weeds by hand to keep the garden weed free
- Do not use pesticides

Watering fruits and vegetables

- Use safe, potable (drinkable) water only
- Avoid using water collected by a rain barrel when watering fruits and vegetables

Preventing cross-contamination

- Wash hands before and after picking produce
- Brush, shake or rub off soil and debris before storing produce in harvest containers
- Choose harvest containers that are smooth, readily cleanable and non-absorbent
- Regularly clean containers thoroughly

Storing and preparing garden produce

- Wash and prepare the fruits and vegetables in the kitchen on a thoroughly cleaned work surface
- Clean hands and utensils thoroughly before they come into contact with the produce
- Store produce from the garden and store-bought produce separately
- Always wash fruits and vegetables before eating or cooking with them

Tobacco, Vapour and Smoke

According to the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017:

- **You cannot smoke or vape on the entire premises of any child care centre or any location that provides an early years program or service.**
- **Home child care locations must be smoke-free and vape-free at all times (including outdoor spaces that children use), even if children are not present.**

Responsibilities of operators

- Ensure that everyone is aware that smoking and vaping is prohibited
- Remove ashtrays and any objects that serve as one
- Ensure that no one smokes or vapes on the premises
- Ensure a person who does not comply does not remain on the premises
- Post No Smoking or Vaping signs at all entrances, exits, washrooms and other appropriate locations (order signs online)

Dangers of second-hand smoke and vapour

- Second-hand smoke, also known as environmental tobacco smoke, is made up of both exhaled smoke and the smoke that comes from the burning end of a cigarette
- There are over 4,000 chemicals in second-hand smoke, including lead, carbon monoxide, arsenic and ammonia
- Second-hand smoke is more harmful to children because of their developing lungs and immune systems
- Second-hand smoke can inhibit the growth and development of an unborn baby, resulting in low birth weight and a greater likelihood of problems during pregnancy and delivery
- In infants and children, second-hand smoke is known to increase the occurrence of ear infections, pneumonia, bronchitis, tonsillitis, asthma, allergies, and sudden infant death syndrome
- Vaping can increase exposure to chemicals that could harm your health including possible lung damage
- Second-hand vapour is not harmless and long-term health effects are still unknown

To further protect children from second-hand smoke, suggest to parents and/or caregivers:

- Make their home smoke and vape-free
- Ensure their vehicle is smoke and vape-free. In Ontario, it is illegal to smoke or vape in a motor vehicle with passengers under 16 years old
- Insist that other caregivers provide a smoke and vape-free environment

For further information relating to the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017, please contact the Environmental Health Division Duty Officer at 905-688-8248 ext. 7590.