



Preventing Injuries to Child Care Workers

Childcare workers complete a variety of tasks throughout their day as they care for infants, toddlers, and young children. Some of these tasks expose employees to hazards including ergonomic stressors, slips, trips, and falls, and potentially infectious illness. Unfortunately, Eastern Alliance has seen how life-changing injuries can result from these hazards:

- While playing musical chairs, an employee and a child were trying to get a chair at the same time. When the employee stretched, she heard something pop in her left upper leg. She tore her hamstring.
- A teacher stepped on a toy losing her balance and fell onto a children's table. She fell and landed on her arm causing a fracture.
- An employee slipped on wet flooring, fell and sprained her ankle.
- An employee was outside playing with children when one child ran into her, causing her to fall and injure her shoulder.

We would like to offer tips to protect your employees and ensure that the childcare setting is safe for both your employees and the children.

Slip, Trip, and Falls – The most common hazards are slipping and falling on wet floors, tripping and falling over items on the floor and falling from heights.

- Consider adding staff at times when spills are more likely, such as at meal times so that extra employees are available to help clean up while others are helping to feed the children.
- Educate employees to promptly and properly clean up spills and provide necessary materials for spill clean-up.
- Require slip-resistant shoes for all employees.
- Organize storage areas to remove clutter; consider wall-mounted storage hooks, shelves, etc.
- Ensure that employees pick up toys from the floor and ensure a clear walkway.
- Encourage employees to walk slowly and avoid rushing.
- Ensure all walking surfaces are safe:
 - Rugs have slip-resistant backing and lay flat with no curled ends, and rotated as necessary.
 - Rugs are cleaned regularly to prevent debris build-up.
 - Rugs are strategically placed near doors, cubbies where wet jackets/coats may be stored, water fountains, etc.



Image Source: susumc.org



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- Stair treads are slip-resistant.
- Damaged flooring is replaced.
- Reduce sudden changes in floor elevation (use ramps in lieu of steps).
- Ensure sturdy stepstools are available and when used, they are placed on level surfaces. Prohibit employees from standing on chairs, tables, etc.

Ergonomic Stressors – Bending, stooping, twisting, reaching, lifting, and carrying are all activities that increase the risk of an injury to childcare employees. The following are recommendations to reduce ergonomic injuries:

Reduce Bending:

- Promote job rotation where possible. For example, rotate between teacher and teacher's aide who is sitting on the floor and lifting children or rotate between who changes diapers in the morning and afternoon as this task often requires a lot of lifting children.
- Educate employees on stretching exercises and encourage daily stretching.
- Encourage employees to frequently change positions.
 - Alternate from sitting to standing.
- Provide ergonomic aides, equipment and furniture that allows employees to work in an upright position as much as possible. Examples include:
 - Rake and lobby dustpans to collect toys.
 - Changing stations with adjoining stairs so employees can guide the child onto the changing table via stairs.
 - Long-handled mops to wipe down tables.
 - Stools or steps for children to use under water fountains and sinks to reduce the need to lift them.
- Encourage employees to use the wall, furniture, or pillow for back support when they are on the ground interacting with the children.
- Educate employees on proper lifting and carrying techniques.
- If lifting is necessary, educate employees on the following lifting technique:
 - Stand close to the child.
 - While keeping your back straight, place one foot slightly forward of the other foot and lower yourself onto one knee.





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- Grasp the child with both arms and hold them close to your body.
- Push with your legs, and slowly return to the standing position.
- Keep your back straight at all times and core muscles engaged.
- To sit the child down, gently squat down and bend your legs.
- Educate employees on how to properly hold a child:
 - Child should be held close and centered to the employee's body.
 - Avoid holding them in one arm and balanced on the hip.
 - Encourage children to put away objects before lifting or holding the child to prevent from being struck by the object.
- If permitted by your state, provide the staff with adult-size chairs for their use. Identify times when it is safe to use them (under supervision) and designate places to store them when not in use that is convenient but keeps children safe from climbing on them.
- Keep crib mattress height raised to reduce bending into the crib (appropriate to the age of child).
- Store sleeping mats vertically to reduce the degree and frequency of bending to set up and put away mats.
- Redesign kitchen area, placing heaviest items at waist height.
- Reduce size and weight of loads, i.e., smaller garbage bags equal less weight.
 - Utilize carts for assistance – place cans on dollies for easy transport (wheels must be lockable in areas other than kitchen).
 - Use strollers or other equipment to move children, instead of wagons so that leg power can be used while pushing. If wagons are needed, use wagons with removable sides so children can climb into the wagon, instead of the worker lifting the child.



Image Source: susumc.org





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Reduce Reaching:

- Provide a step stool to access high shelving instead of reaching overhead.
- Store changing supplies as close as possible to the changing table to reduce reaching.
- Use an easel to support a book when employees are reading to children or support the book on their lap to reduce the need to support the book for long periods of time.
- In situations where a long-handled brush or mop is not feasible, and employees must use a cloth to wipe, have them support their upper body weight by placing their hand on their thigh or the table when bending forward and walk around the table to minimize reaching.



Image Source: susumc.org

Infection Control - The spread of germs is a safety risk in childcare facilities.

- Educate employees on blood borne pathogens and infection control measures.
- Require employees to wear disposable vinyl gloves when changing diapers, helping children use the toilet, wiping noses, brushing teeth, and administering first aid.
- Employees must change gloves and wash hands with warm water and soap in between caring for each child, changing diapers, helping children in the bathroom, before preparing food, before eating, and before leaving for the day.
- Educate employees on proper glove removal.
- Ensure that tables, counters, and sinks are frequently washed down with proper sanitizing products.
- Consult with county and state health departments on required and/or recommended vaccinations for employee health.
- Ensure the proper disposal of infectious materials in trash receptacles and biohazard containers (red bags).

References:

Preventing Injuries to Early Childhood Workers

<https://susumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Preventing-Injuries-to-Early-Childhood-Workers-Revised-10-2019.pdf>

Reducing the Risk of Injuries to Child Care Workers

<https://www.worksafefbc.com/en/resources/health-safety/information-sheets/reducing-risk-injury-child-care-centres/lifting-bending?lang=en>