MONTANA

Choose Safe Places

FOR EARLY CARE & EDUCATION PROGRAMS

A Resource for Parents & Guardians

This voluntary program helps early care and education programs choose locations that are safe from environmental hazards. The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), Public Health and Safety Division offers free resources and assistance to help early childhood educators keep children safe from toxic chemicals and other environmental hazards.

As a parent, you want your child to grow up in a healthy and safe environment. This includes protecting them from harmful chemicals that might be in the air, water, soil, and dust. You might already do things to reduce their exposure to chemicals at home, but what about the other places where your child spends time?

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION PROGRAMS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN KEEPING YOUR CHILD SAFE.

Many young children spend more time at an early care and education program than anywhere else outside of their home. That means it is especially important to make sure your kids are cared for in a safe environment where they are not exposed to harmful chemicals or other environmental hazards.

CHEMICALS CAN POSE HIDDEN DANGERS.

Children and adults could be exposed to harmful chemicals from sources such as:

- Outdoor air pollution.
- Chemicals used indoors.
- Contaminated soil and groundwater.
- Polluted drinking water.

These chemicals can get into our bodies through breathing, eating, drinking, or skin contact.

CHILDREN ARE NOT JUST SMALL ADULTS

- Their brains are still developing.
- They drink more water and breathe more air for their size.
- They play on the ground and put their hands in their mouths.

Exposure to toxic chemicals can disrupt development, learning, and behavior. It can also contribute to diseases later in life. That's why DPHHS is working with the Montana Child Care Licensing Program and early childhood educators to give every child a safe place to learn, play, and grow.

HOW DO EARLY CARE & EDUCATION PROGRAMS PROTECT CHILDREN FROM CHEMICALS?

Montana DPHHS, Early Childhood Services Division requires every licensed early care and education program to meet safety regulations. Some of these reduce chemical exposures by restricting pesticide application and use, and requiring regular drinking water testing. MT Choose Safe Places program builds on these protections. With support from federal, state, and local partners, MT Choose Safe Places is working with participating early education and care facilities to check for environmental contamination at new and existing locations. The purpose of this program is to help early care and education programs ensure they are choosing a site free from environmental hazards and to assist current centers with assessments and technical assistance.

Visit **https://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/epidemiology/mehea/cspece** or email **ChooseSafePlacesMT@mt.gov** to learn more.

Choose Safe Places
for Early Care and Education
Planning. Guidance. Protection.

MONTANA CHOOSE SAFE PLACES HELPS NEW AND EXISTING PROGRAMS CHECK FOR HAZARDS.

Through this voluntary program, we can assist participating early care and education centers in assessing whether their site is safe by considering the following:

Former uses of the site.

- What was on this site in the past? Even if a site looks clean, it might not be free of chemical hazards. Past uses of the building might not be obvious. If the site ever housed a dry cleaner, factory, gas station, or dump site there could be contaminated soil and/or groundwater. Some pollution can vaporize and enter indoor air spaces through cracks in the foundation (called vapor intrusion).
- We can help centers find out how their building and nearby properties were used in the past. Lead exposure is another concern for buildings built before 1978. Testing for lead based paint is easy and inexpensive. We can help centers get a lead paint inspection.

Nearby sites and activities.

- What is nearby? Contamination can come from a source nearby and move onto the early care site through the air, water, or soil. For example, is the early care site near a dry cleaner? Children could be exposed to chemicals in the air.
- We can help centers learn about nearby businesses that use chemicals such as dry cleaners, nail salons, gas stations, factories, and farms. We also look at how close the site is to hazardous cleanup sites (sometimes called Superfund sites).

Naturally occurring contamination.

- Some contaminants occur naturally in air, water, and soil. Radon gas is a common natural hazard. It can seep from underground into indoor air.
- We can help educators learn how to test their buildings for radon.

Access to safe drinking water.

- What is the source of drinking water? Children are especially vulnerable to chemical contaminants in drinking water because they consume more water for their body size than adults. Drinking water can become contaminated with lead, copper, or other chemicals as it travels through pipes to the faucet. While public water supplies are regulated and tested regularly, private well owners are responsible for testing. Wells can become contaminated by a variety of sources, activities or problems such as naturally occurring minerals, fertilizers, pesticides, manufacturing and industrial processes, and septic waste.
- We can help centers learn how to check for lead plumbing issues and how to have their private well tested.

PARENTS AND GUARDIANS CAN HELP BY ASKING A FEW GOOD QUESTIONS.

When choosing an early care and education program for your child, you want a clean, safe environment. Sometimes environmental hazards are not always apparent. Here are a few questions you can ask providers as you search for the right care for your child.

- Has the center been tested for radon? What were the results?
- Is the building older than 1978? If so, has it been tested for lead paint?
- Where does the drinking water come from? Private well? Has it been tested? Are there lead plumbing fixtures?
- Has there ever been an environmental assessment on the property? If so, have any issues found been addressed?

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