



Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education

Planning. Guidance. Protection.



In the United States, about 8.3 million children are in licensed early care and education (ECE) programs for an average of 36 hours per week. ATSDR's Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education helps make sure that ECE programs are in safe places — so that children aren't exposed to dangerous chemicals during their care.

Our goal is to help professionals in public health, community planning, licensing, environmental protection, early care and education, and other fields work together to create safe practices in their communities and to protect children in early care and education programs from chemicals like:

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



Understanding the problem

Even if they meet current state licensing regulations, ECE programs may be located in places where children and staff can come in contact with dangerous chemicals.

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 generally 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 ATSDR is helping

Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education encourages better choices about where to locate ECE programs. It gives communities a framework to adopt practices and support policies that will make sure ECE programs are located safely. It also helps 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



The site is at risk for naturally occurring contaminants like radon



Businesses are using harmful chemicals near the site



The drinking water is safe

Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education also offers models for cooperation between different professionals and agencies — and shows that adding consideration of environmental health concerns to licensing requirements doesn't necessarily require additional funding or staff.



Case study: Connecticut

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (CTDPH) investigated an ECE program that opened on the site of a former gas station.

The problem:

They didn't find problems caused by gas, but they did find high levels of arsenic in the well water.

The solution:

CTDPH educated the center's operators about using filters or bottled water to keep children and staff safe. They also alerted the state ECE licensing program about the local arsenic problem, so it can recommend that centers with private wells conduct routine water testing.



Get involved

When it comes to making sure that ECE programs are located safely, we all have a role to play. The following groups can work together:



Health and environmental protection departments can review environmental data, make recommendations for environmental testing, and help ECE program operators and others understand testing results.



Early care and education licensing officials can consider environmental concerns in their licensing and inspection procedures.



Planners and zoning officials can ask questions about how a site was used in the past before giving a permit — and get the health department involved if needed.



Early care and education program operators can work with state and local health, licensing, and planning and zoning agencies to keep their program safe from dangerous chemicals.



Parents and other concerned community members can ask ECE providers questions about how a program site was used in the past.

Learn more

Check out the [Set It Up Safe: Planning Tool](#). You'll find an interactive checklist for choosing a safe location, a copy of our complete guidelines, and more helpful resources.

Find out how to prevent problems when locating early care and education programs — so that all children have a healthy place to grow, develop, and play: www.atsdr.cdc.gov/safeplacesforECE