

Choose Safe Places

Helping child care provider applicants choose environmentally safe places



Our environment plays a large role in children's health.

In general, children are more likely than adults to be hurt or get sick from environmental hazards. Children eat more food, drink more water, and breathe more air relative to their body size than adults do. In addition, behavior common to children, such as putting their hands in their mouths or playing on the ground, can lead to more contact with harmful substances compared to adults.

Many children spend large amounts of time in child care facilities, so it's important to take action to make these spaces safe from environmental issues.

Four key elements of safe child care locations



Former uses of the site that might have left harmful substances

Not all previous use will present a problem for current child care sites. Identifying those sites with a previous use that might lead to harmful environmental exposures is critical for protecting children.



Movement of harmful substances onto the site from other sites

Contamination can come from a source nearby, such as a gas station or a hair or nail salon, and move onto the child care site through air, water, and soil.



Presence of naturally occurring harmful substances

Naturally occurring contamination, such as arsenic in soil or groundwater, can be as hazardous as contamination from human activities.



Access to safe drinking water

Clean drinking water is essential for children's health. Drinking water can get contaminated through various sources and activities, such as old plumbing or use of fertilizers.

What is Choose Safe Places?

The Choose Safe Places (CSP) program is an initiative to identify and address potential environmental concerns at or around child care facilities to protect children and providers from harmful substances in the environment.

The CSP program works to help child care facilities be environmentally safe by supporting child care providers in identifying safe locations for new child care facilities and educating providers about the environment at current facilities.

Learn more about the Choose Safe Places initiative in Wisconsin by visiting dhs.wisconsin.gov/environmental/child-health

Fill out the Property Checklist to make sure you are choosing a safe place!

Completing [this voluntary checklist](#) (F-02410) will help you identify and address common concerns about harmful substances at or around your proposed child care site.

Wisconsin Department of Health Services

Division of Public Health

Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health

dhs.wisconsin.gov/eh | dhsenvhealth@wi.gov

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Information on the four key considerations



Former use of the property

Contaminants can stay in the environment for a long time, even after the cause of the contamination has stopped.

Lead is a common contaminant in older buildings because lead paint was used until federal law banned lead paint in 1978.

Knowing what the property was used for will help us identify potential contaminants. For example, an old shooting range may have lead bullets on the ground, while a landfill could have a variety of chemicals in soil or water. Just because a property was used for something previously does not mean it is not safe, but there are considerations and further investigation that could be useful.

Helpful resources

BRRTS on the Web. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Redevelopment and Remediation Tracking System is a statewide database of known contaminated sites at dnr.wi.gov/botw

Childhood Lead Program. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services has information on lead and specific information for child care providers at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/lead



Movement of harmful substances from adjacent properties

In the past, industrial practices were not regulated as carefully as they are today and untracked spills occurred. Since chemicals can stay in the environment a long time, they are sometimes able to move through air, water, and soil to neighboring buildings. Chemicals travel through groundwater and then volatilize, or become gases, and can enter homes. This is known as “vapor intrusion,” and some of these chemical vapors can be harmful when present in indoor air.

Helpful resources

BRRTS on the Web. The Bureau of Redevelopment and Remediation Tracking System is a statewide database of known contaminated sites at dnr.wi.gov/botw

Wisconsin Department of Health Services. We have information on vapor intrusion and a video on how vapor intrusion works at dhs.wisconsin.gov/air/vi.htm



Presence of naturally occurring harmful substances

Radon is one of the most common, naturally occurring, harmful substances found in Wisconsin. Radon is radioactive and can cause lung cancer. While you can't see or smell radon, it can leak into your home.

In addition, arsenic and other metals can occur naturally. Depending on where you are located, we may recommend additional testing for metals in your soil.

Helpful Resources

Radon Program. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services has information on radon health effects, how to test, how to mitigate radon, and an interactive map showing where radon has been tested in Wisconsin at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/radon.



Access to safe drinking water

Drinking water that is piped into your home, school, or office comes from either a public water supply or a private well. Knowing about issues that can affect water quality is important for good health. Lead, nitrate, and bacteria are common water contaminants that can affect children's health.

Public water systems are regulated by state and federal laws to ensure drinking water safety. You can find out more about what's in your water system from your Consumer Confidence Report at www.epa.gov/ccr.

Unlike public water systems, the protection and maintenance of private wells are the responsibility of the owner. We at the Department of Health Services recommend testing for common well concerns, such as nitrate, arsenic, and bacteria, and make sure you follow the Department of Children and Families regulations for your facility.

Helpful resources

DNR Drinking Water. The Department of Natural Resources has information on drinking water, both for public and private systems, at dnr.wi.gov/topic/DrinkingWater.
Wisconsin Department of Health Services. We have information on the health effects of common private well water concerns at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/water/drinking.htm.

Instructions for filling out the Property Checklist

How to complete the Voluntary Property Checklist

This [voluntary checklist](#) (F-02410) collects information about how the properties at or near your potential child care facility were used in the past. This information will help us identify whether harmful chemicals may be present at your child care property and provide guidance on actions to take (if needed) to make sure the property is safe.

The questions cover the four key considerations for safe child care siting. Please answer the questions on the Property Checklist to the best of your ability. If you do not know the answer to any of the questions, we recommend you talk with the:

- Property owner.
- Local health department. You can find your local health department information at: www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/lh-depts/counties.htm
- Town planner or zoning office.
- Town engineer or building department.

After completing the form

Mail the completed form to

Wisconsin Department of Health Services
ATTN: Clara Jeong
1 W. Wilson, 150
Madison, WI 53703

Or scan and email the form to dhsenvhealth@dhs.wisconsin.gov.

Legal disclaimer

Responses to the questionnaire are provided as general guidance only and to increase overall safety awareness. This information is not intended to constitute legal or medical advice and you should use it at your own risk. DHS accepts no responsibility or liability for damages arising from use of this information. If a more thorough investigation of the property is warranted, the user should seek the advice of appropriate professionals.

DHS does not make any warranty, express or implied; assume any legal liability for the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of any information herein; represent that its use would not infringe privately owned rights; nor assume any liability with respect to the use of, or for damages resulting from the use of any information, method, or process disclosed in this publication.

Questions?

If you have questions on completing this checklist, please contact the Wisconsin Department of Health Services at 608-266-1120 or email us at dhsenvhealth@dhs.wisconsin.gov.

If you have questions regarding the child care licensing process, please contact the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families at 608-267-3905.

What happens next?

After you finish this checklist, send it to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Our staff will review your information and contact you* with your personalized response.

If you have any questions, please contact us at 608-266-1120 or dhsenvhealth@dhs.wisconsin.gov.

**Make sure you provide your contact information on the questionnaire so we can connect with you.*

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