



Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines for Natural Play Items

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit is responsible for ensuring that all infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures are taken in child care centres to prevent the spread of illness. These measures can be applied to compliment the Ministry of Education practical education approaches. The following IPAC measures are intended to allow for a diverse range of play items/materials for use within the child care centre in a safe and sanitary manner.

Natural Items (e.g. pine cones, bird’s nests, sticks, stones, leaves, honeycomb) may be brought in when:

- The facility is not in outbreak.
- Washable items are cleaned before use.
- Items are not visibly contaminated.
- Non-washable items of high risk for contamination are enclosed in a container or jar to be observed and **not handled** e.g. bird’s nest, eggs, chewed beaver sticks, sticks with insect holes, insects.
- Items from outdoor areas should be obtained away from garbage/waste, animal feces, bird droppings, chemical contamination, pest contamination, etc.
- Items contaminated with blood or body fluids (e.g. mouthed, sneezed/coughed on), should be removed and discarded or cleaned and disinfected immediately.
- Natural items are routinely discarded or cleaned and disinfected on a weekly basis at a minimum.
- Any natural items that are intended to be fixtures in the classroom should be treated to allow for regular cleaning and disinfection.

Use	Avoid
Dry, freshly fallen leaves, sticks, rocks treated as sensory play.	Leaves in contact with animal feces or otherwise contaminated. (i.e. Damp/soggy leaves) Sticks with insect holes or other sign of pest activity
Recycled plastic containers (eg. Yogurt tubs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be cleaned and disinfected prior to use • Can be discarded when damaged 	Used Egg Cartons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absorbent, not easily cleaned • Potential contamination from raw eggs
Cracker/cereal boxes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to attain and recycle after use • No direct contact with food 	Toilet paper rolls, tissue boxes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential contamination from exposure near toilet and contaminated hands • Absorbent, not easily cleanable
Soil obtained from a safe source where the components of soil are known	Soil with animal manure and/or added chemicals such as fertilizer
Permanent Wooden items treated in a manner that allows for them to be easily cleaned and disinfected	Raw wood items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absorbent, not easily cleanable • Potential physical hazard

Additional notes:

1. Staff supervision should be sufficient to ensure that contaminated items are not shared and are immediately removed when the child is finished with the item.
2. Ensure safety risks have been considered for all items used by the children such as exposure to allergens, choking hazards, poisonous seeds, splinters, etc. Child Care staff are expected to conduct a risk assessment to determine if items are appropriate and safe.
3. Natural play items may need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. If you are unsure about an item, please contact the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809 to have your question directed to a Public Health Inspector



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Your Health Connection