

Child Care Connection

The warmer weather is here and there are new resources to share about gardening, emergency preparedness, immunization, animals in child care settings, and menu planning tools to support safe and healthy child care settings.



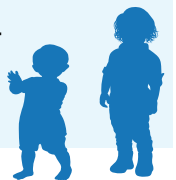
UPDATED! GARDENING RESOURCE

Gardening is a fun, hands-on activity that:

- ✓ Helps develop food skills and a positive relationship with food. When children have early positive food experiences, they are more likely to make food choices that support their health and well-being.
- ✓ Helps children learn about where food comes from and how it grows, which encourages children to talk about, touch and try a variety of foods without pressure. Check out the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health's resource, [Promoting Food Literacy in Child Care](#) for more information.

Planting, watering and harvesting help children develop a sense of pride, teamwork and curiosity. Growing plants can help children explore how food is connected to culture and their community. Nurturing the garden can benefit children's emotional development because gardens provide a safe space for children to express their feelings, engage in sensory play, and connect with the seasons and the natural world and their place within it.

To keep gardening safe, it's important to take steps to reduce infection risks. Centres can refer to our [gardening resource](#) for tips on preventing infectious diseases during outdoor activities.



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MANAGING EMERGENCIES

Emergency Preparedness in Child Care Centres

Emergencies can happen suddenly, so child care centres need to be ready. An up-to-date and clear emergency management policy helps staff know what to do and how to keep everyone safe.

A comprehensive emergency preparedness policy should explain how the centre will respond to a variety of situations such as fires, severe weather, gas leaks, loss of power, or public health issues. The policy should clearly define staff roles and responsibilities, provide key contact information, and include steps to help prevent or reduce risks.

When Should Child Care Centres Close?

Child care centres should close if any of the following conditions occur:

- Fuel or natural gas leak
- Fire or explosion
- Flooding or sewage backup
- Drinking water advisory
- Any other emergency identified by the Medical Officer of Health



Need Support?

Child care centres are encouraged to contact their local public health inspector or call the Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) line at **705-721-7520** or toll-free **1-877-721-7520, ext. 5744** for guidance on emergency preparedness.

MENU PLANNING TOOLS AND SUPPORTS FOR CHILD CARE

The Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) [Child Care Menu Planning Practical Guide](#) was created to help child care providers ensure all meals, snacks and beverages served in child care settings meet healthy eating recommendations for children one year of age and older. Based on national guidance for healthy eating, the guide aligns with requirements set out in the Child Care and Early Years Act and is referenced in the Ministry of Education's *Child Care Centre and Home Child Care Licensing Manual*.

Meal Planning Resources

The ODPH has several helpful tools, including [examples of meal plans](#), a tool to help with [reviewing or revising your meal plan](#) and a [fillable menu template](#), all of which are designed for child care centres.

Looking to explore a bit further? The *Nutrition in Child Care Settings* [eLearning Course](#) is a free, interactive two-hour online course which is designed to empower Ontario child care professionals who are passionate about supporting the healthy growth development, and well-being of young children. It draws directly on the provincial [Child Care Menu Planning Practical Guide](#) and other child care resources developed by ODPH to offer you practical and helpful evidence-informed strategies to support your everyday practice when working alongside children and their families.

If you are looking for additional support with menu creation or menu review for your centre, beyond these provincial resources, some registered dietitians may offer this service for a fee. In your online search, try "Find a Registered Dietitian in Ontario" or "Dietitian Directory AND Ontario," or something along those lines.



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ANIMALS AT THE CENTRE

Animal visits can be fun and educational, but safety is essential. Before bringing animals on site:

- Consult the [Ministry of Health's Recommendations for the Management of Animals in Child Care Settings](#) and your public health inspector.
- Submit a written proposal to your public health inspector.

Your proposal should address the requirements of the [Ministry of Health's Recommendations for the Management of Animals in Child Care Settings](#), including:

- **Type of animal:** All animals can spread germs. Some animals, like reptiles and amphibians, often carry Salmonella. Their bodies, enclosures, and roaming areas can become contaminated. Children can get sick even without touching them. Simply being in an area where reptiles or amphibians are housed or roam can transmit germs.
- How long will the animal will stay at the centre.
- **Where the cage is placed:** Animal enclosures must be away from where children eat and sleep.
- **Children's safety:** Children must be monitored and taught how to touch animals safely to reduce the risk of bites and scratches. Some animals must not be handled by children (e.g., hedgehogs, chinchillas).
- **Who cares for the animal:** There must be one staff member, who does not handle food, to care for the animal and cleans the animal's cage.
- **Hand hygiene:** Children and staff must practise hand hygiene (handwashing or alcohol-based hand rubs) immediately after touching an animal, its food or water, environment and equipment.



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IMMUNIZATION

All children attending child care are required to have their immunization records submitted to their local public health unit. Keeping immunization records up to date is important because, during a vaccine-preventable disease outbreak, the health unit can quickly identify at-risk children and contact their parents and guardians right away.

Child care staff and operators are also required to ensure their immunizations are up to date according to the [Child Care and Early Years Act \(CCEYA\), 2014, Section 57\(1\), O. Reg. 137/2015](#). Each child care operator must keep documentation on file at their facility for each staff member. Please review the [Recommended Immunization for Staff](#).

If you are unsure of your immunization status, please contact your health-care provider or the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) to review your records or book an appointment at one of our clinics.

Families should also be reminded throughout the year to report any new immunizations. Parents and guardians are responsible for ensuring that all updates are submitted to their local health unit.

Children attending before-and/or after-school programs located within their school do not need to resubmit immunization records, as these are collected through the school system.

Some families may choose not to immunize for personal or religious reasons, and some children may be unable to receive certain vaccines for medical reasons. If this applies to any families registered at your centre, please have them contact us at **705-721-7520** or toll-free at **1-877-721-7520, ext. 8827**. We can provide guidance on the exemption process and advise on measures to help protect the child during an outbreak.

How to report immunizations to public health:

The health unit website

 smdhu.org/immsonline

←
OR
→


Download the APP from

 canimmunize.ca/en/features



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NEW AND UPDATED RESOURCES



Canada's food guide kids Toolkit for Educators

Teaching Canada's food guide

The toolkit for educators was developed by public health professionals in support of school nutrition programs. It includes:

- Educators
- Health promoters
- Community leaders

These activities can be used with children 4 to 11 years:

- Fun food stories
- Fun food skills
- Healthy eating song parodies
- Understand Canada's food guide

Before you start

Read each section before you start the activities. The resource includes background information on Canada's food guide, health communication, development of healthy transportation environments, and food safety. Consider the needs of your students for your program.

Sections

- [Introduction to the toolkit](#)
- [Getting started with the toolkit](#)
- [Using the toolkit in your classroom](#)
- [Getting started with the toolkit](#)
- [Using the toolkit in your classroom](#)

Activities

- [Ages 4 to 6](#)
- [Ages 7 to 8](#)
- [Ages 9 to 11](#)

[food-guide.canada.ca/en/toolkit-educators](https://www.food-guide.canada.ca/en/toolkit-educators)

**Canada's Food
Guide Kids:
Toolkit for
Educators**

Reduce the risk of choking

For children ages 1 to 5

Choking on food can happen at any age, but **young children are at higher risk** because their airways are small and can easily block. They are also still learning how to chew and swallow and can easily get distracted while eating.

Choking can happen with any food, but some are considered high risk because of their shape, size and texture.

There are two categories of high-risk foods:

- Foods to avoid
- Foods to modify

Foods to avoid

These foods cannot be modified to make them safer and should not be served to children under age 5:



**Reduce the
Risk of Choking:
For Children
ages 1 to 5**

Check out the [Canada's Food Guide Kids: Toolkit for Educators](#) on the health unit's Child Care Providers section of the website.

The toolkit is for programs that offer food and/or beverages to young children and is adapted from the *Canada's Food Guide: Kids* includes resources for teaching about Canada's Food Guide for children ages 4 to 11 years.

The health unit's version of the resource includes four additional appendices of resources on infant/toddler/preschooler nutrition, sleep, physical activity, and where to find additional health and nutrition resources in the community.

The Toolkit can be used by child care providers and shared with parents and caregivers.

- More information is available on our website in the [Food and Nutrition for Child Care Providers](#) section.
- [Reduce the Risk of Choking: For Children ages 1 to 5](#) is a new resource on the health unit's [Healthy Eating](#) webpage.

UPDATES AND REMINDERS

- **Line lists:** When submitting line lists for outbreaks, use the secure upload link at www.smdhu.org/secureupload. It is essential that child care centres submit line lists **only through** approved secure methods, as they contain personal health information. Submitting line lists through unapproved channels, such as email, may be considered a **privacy breach** and may need to be reported to the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario.
- **Reminder:** Any food-related activities should be reviewed with your public health inspector in advance to ensure food safety requirements are met.
- **Help us stay in touch:** The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit will send out urgent updates by email or telephone. If your centre has had any changes in supervisors, e-mail addresses or telephone numbers, please forward the new information to ipac@smdhu.org to update the contact list.

We welcome your feedback and ideas for future newsletter topics and improvements. Please submit comments to ipac@smdhu.org.

CONTACT US:

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit offices are open Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Call 705-721-7520 or toll-free 1-877-721-7520

- For infection prevention and control questions or concerns, including reporting outbreaks, a public health inspector can be reached on our **NEW ext. 5744**
- To report a [disease of public health significance](#), contact the Infectious Diseases team at **ext. 8809**
- For immunization questions or concerns, use **ext. 8827**
- For reports of animal bites and/or scratches, use **ext. 8811**

