Health Advocates: A Health Advocate is a staff member who has a special interest in health and safety. The Health Advocate can be a teacher/caregiver, director, health coordinator or other staff person whom co-workers agree can call attention to health and safety issues. Health Advocates do not perform most of the health and safety tasks themselves. Instead, they call attention to problems and encourage program staff to find and implement practical solutions. To perform this role competently, the Health Advocate should receive special training.

Almost every study of health and safety in child care finds widespread need for improvement. Studies from Pennsylvania and California show fewer hazards and risky practices when a trained Health Advocate works in the program.

Child Care Health Consultation: The Health Advocate is most likely to be successful when the program has a recognized health professional advisor, called a Child Care Health Consultant (CCHC). The CCHC should visit the facility periodically to develop a frame of reference for practical advice.

The 2006 Accreditation Standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) require a CCHC visit at least twice a year for all programs -- or at least four times a year if infants and toddlers are enrolled. More frequent visits are specified in Caring for Our Children, National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs (CFOC) 2nd edition. CFOC requires at least quarterly visits for all centers, monthly visits for centers with infants and toddlers, and annual visits for family child care providers. Most child care providers who work with a CCHC want more frequent visits because the ongoing help is so useful.

Pennsylvania is implementing child care health consultation through the Regional Keys. ECELS will work with the Regional Keys to locate, train and support health professionals who work as CCHC. ECELS also offers advice via telephone, email and the ECELS website to all those who work in the child care field.

Training on Health Criteria in the revised NAEYC Accreditation: ECELS offers two opportunities for Pennsylvania’s child care program Directors to learn more about the health criteria in NAEYC Accreditation, including the requirement for child care health consultation. One type of training is a workshop; the other is a self-learning module. The 1.5 to 2 hour workshop is called NAEYC Accreditation and National Health and Safety Performance Standards. The self-learning module is called Health Consultation for Early Education and Child Care Self-Study. Completion of this module earns 0.3 CEUs from the University of Pittsburgh as well as state-authorized training credit. Request these training opportunities at www.ecels-healthychildcarepa.org or call ECELS at 800-243-2357.

Changing Soiled Underwear

Disposable pull-up underpants and underwear for children who still have “accidents” may help many children move from diapers toward independent toileting. However, changing soiled pull-ups or underwear involves a risk of spreading infection. During the change, many surfaces may be contaminated with urine and feces. Teachers/caregivers need to follow some procedures to limit the spread of germs.

ECELS has a new fact sheet that describes the “best practice” procedures. On the ECELS website (see link above) click on any section, then on Fact Sheets in the Handy Tools listed in the left pane. Choose the fact sheet titled “Diapering-Changing Soiled Underwear for Toddlers.”
Health and Safety E-News for Caregivers!

ECELS offers E-Mail Alerts about significant new health and safety information. For example, new influenza and hepatitis vaccine requirements will apply this fall. ECELS will prepare and post tools that providers can use to alert parents about these changes. Sign up for E-Mail Alerts from ECELS at www.ecels-healthychildcarepa.org. Don't forget to respond to the e-mail you will receive after you register. This verification makes sure someone doesn't register another person for unwanted e-mail.

ECELS is a program of the PA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The website of ECELS includes lots of information on topics that child care professionals can use. Also, the website gives links to other reliable sources of health and safety information. Use the search function on the ECELS website to find what you need.

Another reliable resource for health and safety information is the national American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) electronic newsletter for early education and child care professionals. For example, the April 2006 issue of the AAP newsletter had updated information on:

- Preventing Infectious Diseases
- Deciding Whether Mildly Ill Children Can Attend Child Care
- Handwashing and Use of Hand Sanitizers

AAP E-News includes links to other resources and handouts. To view all issues, go to: www.healthychildcare.org/CaregiverEnews.cfm. To sign up for the AAP E-News, go to: www.healthychildcare.org/hccpsignup.cfm.

CDC Advises Avoiding Contact between Young Children and Animals

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains a website called Healthy Pets — Healthy People. Recommendations found there may surprise some child care providers who now include contact with animals as part of the curriculum. Outbreaks of serious, even fatal illness after contact between young children and animals led to these restrictive guidelines. Child care providers who ignore the CDC's advice could be liable if children in their care become ill. The CDC recommends:

- An adult should be directly supervising children younger than 5 years of age while they interact with animals.
- Do not allow children to kiss pets or to put their hands or other objects into their mouths after handling animals.
- Children should wash their hands thoroughly with running water and soap after contact with animals or an animal habitat – Using sanitizers or wipes is not enough.
- Children under 5 should avoid contact with any of the following animals and the habitat of these animals, even if the animals are kept for observation only:
  - Reptiles (lizards, snakes and turtles)
  - Amphibians (frogs, toads, newts, and salamanders)
  - Young poultry (baby chicks, ducklings)
  - All animals at petting zoos, farms, fairs and animal exhibits

For details and guidelines for child-contact with specific types of animals, go to the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/healthypets/child.htm.