Now Available!
Voluntary Pre-Licensing Check of Child Health Forms

Under a state contract with confidentiality agreements, ECELS checks for completeness of child health data on file at the time of annual child care center licensing checks. ECELS returns the results to the center and uses aggregate data to plan corrective action at the county and state level. Many centers receive reports showing non-compliance. Now, PA child care centers can ask ECELS to do this check 3 months before the licensing visit. ECELS evaluates a 10% random sample and returns the results within a month. If the check occurs before the licensing visit, the center can get missing data before the inspection.

To take advantage of this service, send ECELS 1) a full set of copies of the most current Child Health Assessment Forms (CY51) - one for each child enrolled more than 60 days, 2) a list of names, birth dates and enrollment dates for all children enrolled more than 60 days, and 3) a request to check the records written on the facility’s letterhead. When the PA DPW Licensing Specialist comes to inspect, show the results of the ECELS check and any corrections the center made.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY CALENDAR**
Use the calendar to plan ahead.

**December**

- **Holiday Food Safety:** Don’t let a holiday celebration turn into a foodborne illness fiasco! Beef, pork, chicken and stuffing all have different safe cooking temperatures. Check out the Safe Cooking Temperature Chart insert and cook it right! For more information, contact the US Department of Agriculture Meat and Poultry Hotline at 800/535-4555.

- **Holiday Gift Exchange:** Suggest that parents use books and safe toys for a holiday Pollyanna. For toy safety materials, use the ECELS Order Form on page 7.

**January**

- **Indoor Air Quality:** In winter, dry, hot air takes moisture from skin and mucous membranes. Keep indoor air temperature between 65-75 degrees F in winter, but make sure to open the windows in every room each day to circulate fresh air. Check with a certified heating and ventilation contractor to be sure air flow and exchange are adequate.

- **Asthma can be a problem in winter:** Use the Health & Safety Workshop Training Request Form insert for an asthma workshop.

**February**

- **Child Passenger Safety Week:** February 10-16, 2002. Make sure children are properly buckled up upon arriving at and leaving child care for the day. Children need to use an age-appropriate car seat until they are nearly adult height and weight. Use the ECELS Order Form on page 7 for a flier on vehicle child restraints and a “Buckle Up Every Time” key ring. For more information on car seats, call 800-CAR BELT.
Thermometers and Mercury Poisoning

In July 2001, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) addressed the hazards of mercury in a technical report published in the journal *Pediatrics*.

According to the report, everyone is exposed to mercury, an environmental toxin. It comes in several forms, and can be found in air, water and food. Significant exposure, whether brief or extended, can produce a broad range of effects on the central nervous system, kidneys, skin and lungs. In children, significant exposure can result in learning disabilities, mental retardation, blindness and spasticity. It was long-term exposure to mercury that affected the “Mad Hatter” in the children’s classic *Alice in Wonderland*. (Hat makers used liquid mercury to treat felt used for hats. Some developed brain disease from the exposure.)

To minimize children’s exposure to mercury, the AAP suggests that pediatricians phase out mercury-containing devices such as old-style thermometers and sphygmomanometers (blood pressure measuring devices). The AAP recommends that caregivers remove mercury thermometers from environments where there are children. Alternatives to mercury devices are readily available, such as digital thermometers.

The problem with mercury thermometers is that when they break, the mercury can evaporate causing hazardous mercury vapors in indoor air. The risk increases when the mercury seeps into carpet and clean-up is attempted with a vacuum cleaner. Vacuuming spreads the mercury.

**If a mercury thermometer breaks**

These guidelines are adapted from the US Environmental Protection Agency website (www.epa.gov):

1. Increase ventilation in the room with outside air and close the room off from the rest of the building. If fans are available, use them for a minimum of one hour to help ventilate the room.
2. Pick up the mercury with an eyedropper or scoop up beads with a piece of heavy paper (e.g. playing cards, index cards).
3. Place the mercury, contaminated instruments (dropper/heavy paper) and any broken glass in a plastic zipper bag (triple bag), tightly sealing each bag. Place the bags in a wide-mouth, plastic container with a tightly fitted lid.
4. Call your local health department for the nearest approved mercury disposal location. If disposal at such a location is not possible, dispose of the plastic container that has the mercury in it in accordance with state and local requirements.
5. If weather permits, leave windows open for approximately two days to assure the area is completely ventilated.
6. Other tips when cleaning up a mercury spill:
   - DO NOT use household cleaning products to clean the spill, particularly products that contain ammonia or chlorine. These chemicals will react violently with mercury, releasing a toxic gas.
   - DO NOT use a broom or paint brush to clean up mercury. It will break the mercury into smaller beads and spread them around.
   - DO NOT use an ordinary vacuum or shop vacuum. The vacuum will put mercury vapor into the air and increase the likelihood of human exposure.

For a copy of the AAP’s press release on mercury-containing thermometers, or for a copy of the technical report, use the ECELS Order Form on page 7.
New Immunization Requirements for School Entry 2002-2003

The PA Department of Health (DOH) announced new school immunization requirements in July 2001. Beginning at the start of the 2002-03 school year, Pennsylvania’s children entering school for the first time (either kindergarten or first grade) MUST have proof of varicella (chicken pox) immunity either by vaccine, history of disease or lab test. Students entering the 7th grade MUST have varicella immunity AND three doses of the Hepatitis B vaccine. Philadelphia is implementing the requirement for varicella vaccine for 2001-02, a year earlier than the rest of the state — These new requirements are in addition to the current immunization requirements.

Pennsylvania’s Physician General Dr. Robert S. Muscalus said, “Making sure our kids have all of the proper immunization requirements shows Pennsylvania’s commitment to our children and families. These children are our future, and we need to ensure their health.”

These vaccines are already required for enrollment in PA Department of Public Welfare licensed or regulated child care. Child care directors must ensure that children’s immunizations are up-to-date. For more information, call 877/PA-HEALTH. For a flier announcing the new requirement, use the ECELS Order Form on page 7.

The US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recently released a report on deaths in playpens. Since 1988, more than 200 babies have died while in playpens; 26 of the playpen deaths occurred in child care.

For years, CPSC has warned about the dangers of soft bedding such as quilts, comforters and pillows in cribs. Soft bedding can become molded around an infant’s face and cause suffocation. As many as one-third of baby deaths attributed to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), in fact, may be suffocations in soft bedding.

Over the years, playpens, portable cribs, and play yards have evolved into virtually identical products. Parents and caregivers today use playpens as places for babies to both sleep and play. So, remember that the same safe sleeping guidelines used for babies in cribs need to be followed in playpens too. Always place babies on their backs and on firm, flat mattresses. Do not add extra mattresses or any soft bedding. The CPSC also reminds parents and caregivers to contact them before using any playpen to make sure it has not been recalled. Call 800/638-2772 or check the recalls section of the website at www.cpsc.gov.

For a copy of the CPSC press release, use the ECELS Order Form on page 7.
In the Fall 2001 issue of HEALTH LINK, we discussed how children’s online experiences can be safe, fun and educational. To make sure kids stay safe, read on!

Using the Internet - What Are the Risks?
- Exposure to material that is sexual, hateful, violent or false in nature, or encourages activities that are dangerous, illegal or otherwise inappropriate.
- Pedophiles who may try to arrange face-to-face meetings.
- Chat / bulletin board messages that are harassing, demeaning, belligerent or give false information.
- Children and adults may do something that has negative legal or financial consequences without realizing what they’re doing, e.g. giving out a credit card number or doing something that violates another person’s rights.

For parents and caregivers
Supervise school-age children’s use of the Internet while in child care. Pass on to parents the following:
- Some online services and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) allow parents to limit their children’s access to certain services and features such as adult-oriented web sites and chat rooms / bulletin boards. Check with your ISP for more information.
- Keep track of any files your children download to the computer. Think about sharing an email account with your children to oversee their email.
- Consider the filtering features built into the popular Internet browsers to limit children’s access to only those sites that have been rated appropriate for children. You can find a directory of these filtering programs at <www.safekids.com/filters.htm>

For children
Teach children to:
1. Never give out identifying information - home address, school name, or telephone number - in a public message forum.
2. Use a pseudonym, a made-up name or expression, instead of their real name.

3. Never arrange a face-to-face meeting with another computer user without parental permission.
4. Never respond to messages or bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening, or make them feel uncomfortable.
5. Tell you if they receive a message that makes them feel uncomfortable. If you or your child receives a message that is harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening, forward a copy of the message to your ISP, and ask for their assistance. Instruct children not to click on any links that are contained in email from persons they don’t know. Such links could lead to sexually explicit or otherwise inappropriate web sites.

Understand that people online may not be who they seem, and that everything they read online may not be true. Explain that many grown-ups have to be taught to be skeptical about what seems to be factual and credible on the Internet.

First steps to Internet safety for children
Have children access the Pennsylvania State Police’s website at <www.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/State_Police/kidzone/intsafe.htm> and print out a copy of “Internet Safety Tips.” Have children read the tips to you and explain their understanding of them.

For a copy of “Child Safety on the Information Highway”, including a tear-off sheet called “My Rules for Online Safety”, use the ECELS Order Form on page 7.

Adapted from “Child Safety on the Information Highway”, a publication of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. For more information or to order publications, call 800/THE-LOST or access their website at www.missingkids.com
Check Playgrounds in Winter too

Caregivers may be tempted to let outdoor play equipment go unchecked during winter months. But the types of playground injuries that occur in warm months can still occur when the temperatures drop. There may be even more of a hazard in winter months when snow, wind, and freezing rain take their toll on the surfacing material underneath your play equipment. What was nine inches of cushioning mulch in the summer and fall may have become hardened or compressed to a depth that would not protect a child who fell onto it. Rubber-like materials used for surfacing may be damaged in winter months also.

The US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recently issued a report showing that more deaths to children occurred on backyard playgrounds than on public playgrounds. Of the 150 child deaths that occurred on playgrounds from 1990 to 2000, ¾ of the deaths in home locations resulted from hangings from ropes, cords, homemade rope swings, and other similar items. New safety standards, aimed at reducing the risk of strangulation, require that ropes be secured at both ends and that makers of home equipment warn against attaching additional ropes.

CPSC’s study also found that only 9% of home playgrounds had protective, shock-absorbing surfacing. Dirt and grass, which are the most prevalent surfaces under home playground equipment, do not adequately protect children from serious head injuries.

To help prevent injuries from falls and other hazards on outdoor play equipment, follow the recommendations of the CPSC:

- Install and maintain at least 9 inches of wood chips, mulch, or shredded rubber for play equipment up to 7 feet high. If sand or pea gravel is used, install at least a 9 inch layer for play equipment up to 5 feet high. Or, use surfacing mats made of safety-tested rubber or rubber-like materials. (Editor’s note: the CPSC does NOT mean mats used for activities like indoor exercising or somersaulting. Also, in winter, moist sand hardens so that it may not be protective at all.)

- Install protective surfacing at least 6 feet in all directions from play equipment. For swings, the surface should extend, in back and front, twice the length of the swing chains from the ground.

- Never attach ropes, jump ropes, clotheslines, or pet leashes to the equipment. This can present a serious strangulation hazard to children.

- Check for and repair sharp points or edges; cover open “S” hooks or protruding bolts.

- Check for openings in guard rails or between ladder rungs. To prevent entrapment, spaces should be either less than 3 ½ inches or more than 9 inches – otherwise children can enter with their bodies, but get their heads stuck.

- Always supervise young children to make sure they are safe.

To help keep your outdoor play equipment safe ALL YEAR ROUND, use the ECELS Order Form on page 7 to order the Active Play (playground safety) self-learning module or use the Training Request Form to ask for an Active Play workshop. Remember that in winter, sliding boards covered with ice and climbing equipment blanketed by snow can appear very attractive to children. These items can be extra slick and result in a child losing his footing on a slide ladder, or slipping on climbing equipment.

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To be sure your playground is safe, arrange to have a Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) come for an audit. These inspectors receive training from a federally-funded program, but accept work as private consultants on a fee-for-service basis. Contact ECELS for information on how to find a CPSI.

Even when you have had a professional inspection and corrected what was found, be sure to check your playground every day for new maintenance problems before allowing children to use the equipment. Also, remember that the same hood ties on sweatshirts and windbreakers that are hazardous (strangulation hazards) for children to wear on playground equipment in the warm months should be removed from snowsuits, coats with hoods, etc. in the winter too. Velcro makes a good substitute for drawstrings on hoods. Keep long scarves, and mittens joined together by long yarn ties off the playground too.

Share this information with parents!

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**ECELS Q & A**

**Q:** What is the mixture for the bleach solution if you use the “Ultra Clorox®” concentrated bleach?

**A:** “Ultra Clorox®” is only a little bit more concentrated than regular Clorox®, so the dilution for use in child care is not different from the regular household bleach. Whether you use the regular household bleach or an “Ultra” preparation as a spray application, the solution should be mixed fresh daily, ¼ cup of bleach per 1 gallon of water or 1 tablespoon of bleach per quart of water. This makes a 1:64 dilution that needs 2 minutes of contact time to work. Bleach should be replaced 6 months after you first open the container to ensure that the concentration of available chlorine remains at effective levels. Chlorine evaporates into the air from bleach in the concentrated and in the more dilute solutions. That is why you must make up diluted solutions at least daily and replace your stock supply bottle every 6 months.

Regular chlorine bleach is 5.25% hypochlorite. Ultra Clorox® bleach is 6% hypochlorite. When mixed with water in a 1:64 solution, the diluted 5.25% hypochlorite solution contains about 500 ppm (parts per million). When mixed with water in a 1:64 solution, the 6% hypochlorite solution (“Ultra Clorox®”) contains 800 ppm. Since you need 500-800 ppm, there is little real difference between these solutions.

Prior to using the bleach solution to sanitize, clean any visible soil from the surface with a detergent and rinse well with water. Bleach is not a good cleaning agent. Air drying is fine, since chlorine evaporates when the solution dries. You can dry the surface, but wait for the contact time to elapse first.

If you are using bleach to sanitize dishes, clean them with detergent and water, rinse, then use the recommended dilution of bleach for clean dish sanitation. For dish sanitation, the federal guidelines call for ¼ to 1½ teaspoons of bleach/gallon of water to obtain a recommended 50-100 ppm. This dilution needs a minimum of 1 minute contact time with dishes that have been freshly cleaned and rinsed. You may use the stronger solution of ¼ cup bleach per 1 gallon water for dishes if you don’t want to make up a different dish sanitizing concentration, but it will be more than you need. You must use at least the 1:64 spray application and a contact time of 2 minutes for sanitizing other surfaces.

Read and follow the warning labels before mixing bleach with any other household chemicals, detergents or cleaning products. Dangerous fumes may result.
Looking for some interesting websites you can share with preschoolers and school-aged children in your care? Each edition, HEALTH LINK will spread the news about health and safety websites we’ve found and ideas on how to get kids involved.

School-aged children can read the Surgeon General’s Report for Kids about Smoking at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sgr/sgr4kids/sgrmenu.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sgr/sgr4kids/sgrmenu.htm). They’ll learn that kids who start smoking are more likely to get lower grades in school and have a low self-image. The web site offers “10 Things You Can Do to Make Your World Smoke-Free” such as creating a smoke-free school petition, writing to professional sports teams to ask them to not allow tobacco advertising in their stadiums, and creating flyers and articles for local newspapers on the hazards of secondhand smoke. Kids can read stories about other kids around the country who have organized antismoking rallies and boycotts.

Have the school aged kids in your care come up with some creative antismoking ideas themselves, and let the Centers for Disease Control know about them!
Meet ECELS Staff!

This issue of HEALTH LINK spotlights Training and Technical Assistance Coordinator Nancy Alleman. Nancy arranges on-site mentoring sessions and health and safety workshops for PA child care.

Nancy started her pediatric nursing career in Iowa, later worked for the Denver Indian Health Board, then moved to Harrisburg as a public health nurse for Visiting Nurse Association of Central PA, Inc. (VNA). She is eager to share her skills and experience as a health consultant by working with PA child care providers and health professionals to plan workshops as well as mentoring and consulting.

Nancy works from an office in her home in Camp Hill. She is the helpful voice that you will hear if you call 800/395-3948 to learn more about health and safety workshops and technical assistance that can be delivered on-site, funded and registered for credit by the PA Child Care/Early Childhood Development Training System.

Nancy Alleman, BSN, CRNP

Healthy Child Care
PA logo here

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