

Health and Safety Information

Early Learning and Child Care

Cold Weather

Information for Licensed Centres, Nursery Schools, and Homes

Why Cold Weather Safety Matters in Child Care?

Manitoba experiences extreme winter weather that can pose health and safety risks for young children. Infants and young children lose body heat more quickly than adults and may not recognize or communicate cold-related discomfort. Exposure to cold temperatures and wind chill can lead to frostbite, hypothermia, and other cold-related injuries if appropriate precautions are not taken. Outdoor play can continue safely in cold weather with appropriate clothing, supervision, and risk assessment. Outdoor play supports children's health, development, and connection to the environment and is an important part of daily programming in all seasons.

Role of Child Care Providers

- Monitor weather conditions daily and before preparing for outdoors, including temperature and wind chill during cold weather months using the Environment Canada [weather forecast page](#) or [the WeatherCAN app](#).
- Use professional judgment to shorten, modify, or cancel outdoor play within the requirements set out in Manitoba Regulation 62/86, section 10(4) for centres and Section 26(2) for homes.
- Ensure children are appropriately dressed and supervised during cold weather conditions.

Understanding Cold Weather and Wind Chill

- Wind chill combines air temperature and wind speed to describe how cold it feels on exposed skin.
- Wind chill increases the risk of frostbite and hypothermia, particularly for young children.
- Cold weather conditions can change quickly and should be reassessed throughout the day.
- Public Health guidance supports the safe and continued attendance for children with head lice once treatment has begun.

Outdoor Play During Cold Weather

- Outdoor play is required daily under Manitoba child care regulations for full-time licensed centres (operating more than 4 hours/day).
- As set out in Manitoba Regulation 62/86, outdoor play must be provided except where:
 - the temperature is below -25°C or the wind chill is below -25
 - a parent/guardian or medical professional advises against outdoor play
 - school division policy restricts outdoor play
 - other weather or environmental conditions may affect children's health, safety, or well-being
- Weather thresholds set out in regulation define when outdoor play is not required. When conditions do not meet these thresholds, programs should consider wind chill, duration, intensity, and children's tolerance, including signs of cold stress.

- Outdoor play is expected to continue in cold weather when children and staff are appropriately prepared and conditions do not meet regulatory thresholds.
- Encourage vigorous gross motor activity in cold weather to keep warm.
- Play in areas more protected from wind, or create shelter from wind using tarps or other materials.
- When outdoor play is not appropriate, alternative indoor physical activity is encouraged.

Winter Clothing and Protection

- Ensure children are dressed in weather-appropriate winter clothing, such as insulated coats, snow pants, winter boots, hats, and mittens.
- Layering is important for all children and staff, and infants may require one additional layer for additional warmth.
- Face protection is recommended during very cold or windy conditions. Ensure all exposed skin is covered when conditions pose a risk of frostbite.
- If a child is not adequately dressed, outdoor play expectations must be modified for that child to ensure safety.
- Where possible, child care programs should consider having extra seasonal clothing available (e.g., mitts, hats) to support children's participation in outdoor play.

Symptoms of Cold-Related Illness

- Early signs may include shivering, pale or reddened skin, numbness, fatigue, or irritability.
- Frostbite may appear as white or greyish-yellow skin that feels hard or numb.
- Hypothermia symptoms may include confusion, slurred speech, slowed movement, or drowsiness.

Responding to Cold-Related Illness

- Move the child indoors to a warm area immediately.
- Remove wet clothing and replace it with dry, warm layers.
- Warm the child gradually using dry, warm clothing or blankets.
- Seek medical attention if symptoms persist or worsen.

Recommended Practices

- Develop and follow a cold weather response plan as part of the facility's Enhanced Safety Plan. See section below, How to Create a Cold Weather Response Plan for guidance on creating this plan.
- Review winter safety procedures with staff before and during the winter season.
- Communicate cold weather expectations and clothing requirements clearly with families.
- Reassess conditions throughout the day and adjust programming, as needed.

How to Create a Cold Weather Response Plan

A cold weather response plan helps programs prepare for winter conditions and respond consistently when cold temperatures may pose a risk to children's health and safety. Plans can be brief and should be incorporated into the facility's existing enhanced safety plan. Key elements include:

1. When the plan applies
 - Applies during periods of cold temperatures, including extreme cold or significant wind chill.
 - Identifies who is responsible for monitoring weather conditions and making decisions about outdoor play.
2. Prevention measures
 - Monitor daily weather forecasts, including temperature and wind chill.
 - Plan outdoor play with flexibility to shorten, adjust, or move activities indoors as needed.
 - Encourage appropriate winter clothing and plan for children who may require additional support.
3. Staff roles and responsibilities
 - Identify who monitors children for signs of cold-related illness.
 - Clarify responsibilities for adjusting programming and supervising outdoor play.
 - Ensure staff understand safe outdoor practices and response procedures.
4. Response to cold-related illness or exposure
 - Ensure staff are familiar with early signs of cold-related illness, including frostbite and hypothermia.
 - Follow established procedures to bring children indoors and warm them safely.
 - Identify when medical attention may be required.
5. Communication with families
 - Share expectations for winter clothing and outdoor play with families.
 - Communicate how decisions about outdoor play are made during cold weather conditions.
6. Review and improvement
 - Review practices following periods of extreme cold or weather-related incidents.
 - Update the plan as needed and share changes with staff and families.

For Additional Information:

- [Fall and Winter Safety](#) (Government of Manitoba)
- [Cold Weather and Your Health](#) (Government of Manitoba)
- [Manitoba - Weather Conditions and Forecast by Locations](#) (Government of Canada)
- [ECO - Full Size Infographic](#) (Outside Play)