



HEALTH AND SAFETY in Child Care

This issue brief is the second in a series developed by Early Childhood Iowa – Quality Services and Programs Component Group. The issue brief is developed to inform policy makers about the importance of Health and Safety in Child Care for children. The Parent’s Story describes the health and safety issues within child care environments.

Parents’ Story

*Sarah always dreamed of staying at home with her kids. Sarah and her husband Ted both have to work to make ends meet. Sarah travels almost an hour to get to work, and Ted works in a factory in their hometown. Her dream of staying at home with her children is not a reality because one person working is just not enough to pay for the essentials of living. Sarah and Ted only see their kids for a couple of hours each night before they go to sleep. The challenges they face include juggling work schedules, doctor appointments, and child care arrangements. When one of their kids get sick, Sarah is faced with the dilemma of who can take care of her kids so that she doesn't have to miss work. Ted is unable to miss work at the factory, and Sarah is an hour away if one of the kids gets sick or injured during the day. They like their child care provider but worry that the provider does not have the current, appropriate information she needs to keep their kids healthy and safe. Recently a **child care nurse consultant** started working with the provider to educate and inform her about current health and safety practices, such as proper hand washing, safety in play equipment, and proper steps for diapering and bathroom. Since the child care nurse consultant started working with Sarah and Ted's provider, their kids have not been sick or injured during the day. The provider made many positive changes to the environment. Sarah and Ted worry less than they used to and now are able to more effectively manage the complications of a household with two working parents.*

Health and Safety in Child Care – what is the problem?

Studies show Iowa has not met the challenge for supporting quality child care. Iowa ranked significantly lower in quality child care than other Midwestern states (Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska) according to the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium study (2002). Health and safety issues reported by the study include:

- No safe space for infants and toddlers to crawl or walk around
- Unsanitary conditions for toileting and diaper changing
- Inappropriate caregiver responses to toileting accidents
- Lack of hand washing
- Lack of toys and equipment for age-appropriate development
- Inadequate or inappropriate nutrition including propped bottles and forced feedings

Even more alarming are the findings from Iowa’s Child Death Review Team. Twenty percent (20%) of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) events occur in the child care setting with findings that suggest that often the infant was placed in an unsafe sleeping position.

Quality Services & Programs Workgroup Members

- Sylvia Becerra
Des Moines Public Schools
- Mary Cameron
State Library
- Sally Clausen
Department of Public Health
- Carrie Fitzgerald
Department of Public Health
- Janet Gartin
Department of Human Rights
- Dee Gethmann
Department of Education
- Connie Gronstal
AEA 13
- Gretchen Hageman
Department of Public Health
- Sue Hegland
Iowa State University
- Erin Kongshaug
Child Health Specialty Clinics
- Ruth Krueger
Mid-Iowa Community Action
- Joyce Leavell
AEA 9
- Peggy Martin
ISU Extension
- Sharon Mays
ISU Extension
- Heather Miller
Department of Public Health
- Brenda Moore
Child Health Specialty Clinics
- Pat McReynolds
SIEDA
- Mary Odell
Lutheran Services in Iowa
- Deb Schrader
Adair/Warren CEA
- Georgia Sheriff
Drake University – Head Start
- Jan Steffen
Department of Public Health
- Jane Stockton
Department of Public Health
- Christy Thies
Prevent Child Abuse Iowa
- Jenny Untiedt
Department of Public Health
- PJ West
MATURA Action Corporation
- Jovanka Westbrook
Prevention Concepts
- Cathy Wheatcraft
CCR&R
- Becky White
Academy of Pediatrics

What do studies tell us?

1. **Iowa Parents work** – Iowa currently ranks among the top three states with the highest percentage (70%) of parents of young children in the work place.
2. **Consultation with a Child Care Nurse Consultant improves practice** – The Quality Enhancement Project demonstrated that consultation with a nurse improved sanitation, safe active play, emergency preparedness, nutrition, and Sudden Infant Death/Back to Sleep issues. During the study, these issues all improved over the six-month observation period, with consultation and technical assistance from the child care nurse consultant.
3. **Investments in Early Childhood Pay Off** - The research is clear; investments in early childhood pay off and offer the best rate of return (Heckman, 2004). Dr. James Heckman, a Nobel laureate economist, examined the relative merits of public investments by different ages. Additional economic studies conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis report similar results: 15 – 17% return on investment (Grunewald).

What strategies already exist that can enhance Health & Safety in Iowa's Child Care?

Over the past five years, state agencies (including the Departments of Human Services, Public Health, and the Office of Empowerment), Community Empowerment areas **and** local health agencies partnered to develop a network of specially trained nurses with expertise in the child care setting. These nurses are recognized as **Child Care Nurse Consultants (CCNC)** after they complete a comprehensive training based on a curriculum from the National Training Institute for Child Care Health Consultant (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill). At least one half-time **Child Care Nurse Consultant** is available to all child care providers through the 24 local Child Health Agencies (Maternal and Child Health Title V programs sponsored by the Iowa Department of Public Health, serving all 99 counties). As the role of the **CCNC** emerges, local agencies blend funding to develop the service.

What special skills do Child Care Nurse Consultants offer?

They receive specialized education that addresses the unique needs of the child care setting including:

- Health resources in the community – coordination with medical providers
- Principles of communicable disease control and disease reporting requirements
- Child care considerations for inclusion of children with special health care needs
- Injury prevention for children and child care workers
- Nutrition and feeding considerations for children in the group setting
- Oral health care for young children
- Occupational health risks for care providers – including immunization recommendations
- Consumer product safety in child care
- National health and safety standards for out-of-home care

Summary: Iowa should advance the quality of child care available to families by addressing the basic elements of health and safety in the child care setting, including funding the Child Care Nurse Consultants as part of the Quality Rating System. Costs associated with implementing system improvements represent an investment that consistently demonstrates a high rate of return. The Child Care Nurse Consultant network represents a resource upon which Iowa can build community-based, system level services.