

# Delaware's Child Care Regulations Promote Healthy Child Development

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Delaware's child care providers play an important role in nurturing the physical and emotional health of our state's youngest and most vulnerable residents. The First State's child care regulations are nationally recognized for their sound requirements to promote young children's healthy development. Collaboration among public, private and nonprofit organizations has made possible the establishment of child care regulations that teach healthy lifestyles to our youngest children and serve as a model for other states.

## Progress in Delaware

Delaware has made significant progress since having some of the oldest child care regulations on the books prior to 2007. Comprehensive changes to standards for physical activity and nutrition in the child care setting, made possible through collaboration among Delaware's Office of Child Care Licensing (OCCL), Delaware's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), sponsors of child care centers and family child care homes, local food vendors, and Nemours Health & Prevention Services, ensure that children in licensed child care are provided healthy food and sufficient physical activity for their growing bodies.

These standards promote young children's health and development in the following ways:

- **Instilling healthy eating habits:** Good nutrition supports children's physical and cognitive development.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to eating habits, early childhood is the most effective period in which to intervene.<sup>2</sup> Child care programs can improve young children's nutrition by providing healthy foods and by educating children, parents and teachers on the importance of healthy eating habits.
- **Encouraging regular physical activity:** When children have the opportunity for adequate physical activity, they benefit physically, psychologically and socially.<sup>3</sup> Increasing the amount of physical activity in child care programs not only helps to prevent obesity, but also supports children's overall healthy development.

## Regulations Address the Childhood Obesity Health Crisis

Childhood obesity is one of the most serious public health crises facing the nation.<sup>4</sup> Recent data reveal that 39.7% of children ages two to 17 in Delaware are overweight or obese,<sup>5</sup> which puts them at risk for diabetes and other chronic illnesses and can lead to lifelong health problems. Fostering healthy habits at an early age is critical to reversing this trend. Parents and families need to encourage children to adopt healthy behaviors, such as eating fruits and vegetables and participating in physical activity on a daily basis. But they also rely on the support of other individuals and organizations that care for children. The fact that nearly 60% of Delaware children ages birth to five are cared for by someone other than a parent for 10 or more hours per week<sup>6</sup> underscores the importance of child care providers offering ample opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity and encouraging and reinforcing these healthy behaviors.



## About Nemours Health & Prevention Services

Nemours Health & Prevention Services (NHPS) is a division of Nemours, one of the nation's largest pediatric health systems, operating the Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children and outpatient facilities throughout the Delaware Valley and northern and central Florida. The goal of NHPS is to drive long-term improvements in policies and practices that promote child health, and to leverage community strengths and resources to help children grow up healthy. One of our initial areas of emphasis is the prevention of childhood obesity through promotion of healthy lifestyles, the centerpiece of which is the *5-2-1-Almost None* prescription for a healthy lifestyle:

- Eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day.
- Spend no more than two hours per day in front of a screen (TV, video games, recreational computer time).
- Get at least one hour of physical activity per day.
- Drink almost no sugary beverages like soda and sports drinks.



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## Child Care Providers Make Healthy Changes

Delaware's child care providers are making great strides in promoting healthy eating and physical activity among the children in their care. They have shown that making healthy changes is feasible, especially when done in partnership with families. Providers throughout the state have found strategies that work for the families they serve and are consistent with the regulations. Some staff members serve as role models by demonstrating to children that fruits and vegetables are tasty and easy to eat. Many centers are implementing early health education as providers work closely with families to ensure that parents and caregivers understand the importance of healthy lifestyles in their children's development.

## Support and Resources for Nutrition and Physical Activity

The results of a survey of directors and teachers in 146 licensed child care centers in Delaware revealed that the majority of respondents believe their centers have the support and resources they need to implement the nutrition and physical activity standards.<sup>7</sup>

### Support for Healthy Options

- 89% of directors and 85% of teachers responding to the survey agree that their center's administration supports implementation of the OCCL and CACFP standards.
- 85% of directors and 88% of teachers responding to the survey agree that teachers and staff support implementation of their center's nutrition and physical activity standards.
- 71% of directors and 71% of teachers responding to the survey agree that parents support implementation of their center's nutrition and physical activity standards.<sup>8</sup>

**93% of directors and 89% of teachers responding to the survey personally support implementation of their center's nutrition and physical activity standards<sup>9</sup>**

### Resources for Healthy Options

- 70% of directors and 76% of teachers responding to the survey agree that their center has sufficient financial resources to purchase healthy foods.
- 75% of directors and 82% of teachers responding to the survey agree that their center has appropriate space and equipment to store and prepare healthy foods.
- 89% of directors and 85% of teachers responding to the survey agree that their center has enough staff to implement their center's nutrition and physical activity policies.<sup>10</sup>

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## Providers Share Positive Experiences

*“It is important that centers ensure that children eat healthy and engage in physical activities as this is the cornerstone of healthy development. Having specific guidelines instituted by the Office of Child Care Licensing ensures that centers have a framework to utilize in creating their center and family policies. These guidelines allow us to engage families as well as educate them to be an active participant in their child’s nutrition and physical development. The implementation of these guidelines has not been difficult. Yes, it does take some creativity and thought process to change our menus or to pack a nutritious lunch, but the end result is that children are eating healthy.”*

– Cheryl Clendaniel, Early Childhood Administrator, The Learning Center

*“Since we learned about the importance of providing children healthy foods, we have changed our menus, lesson plans, food that we serve at school, parent meetings and staff meetings, and the newsletters that we send out to our families concerning health and nutrition issues. We have weekly ‘stars’ by highlighting a different fruit or vegetable each week. On the last day of the month, we have a Market Day where each child gets to go shopping and choose one of the four ‘stars’ to take home with either a recipe using that fruit/vegetable or an information sheet concerning the fruit/vegetable. We’re making these changes at all of our centers. Our staff now understand the importance of good nutrition to children’s health. We in turn can carry this message to the children and families that we serve now and in the future.”*

– Mary Knapp, Education and Disabilities Coordinator, Telamon Corporation

*“Breakfast, lunch and snack have been part of our whole child approach for more than 120 years. What’s new is today’s wealth of knowledge about the impact that good eating habits developed early in life can have on a person’s lifetime health. Teaching good eating habits and proper exercise are more important than ever before in our school’s long history. Our young children learn to make wise food choices, and our families are learning to put good foods on the table even at a time when dollars are tight. St. Michael’s has the opportunity to change the way families think so that they see healthy eating as a critical ingredient in raising children.”*

– Helen Riley, Executive Director, St. Michael’s School

*“Since 2008, the Latin Center, with the help of the Nemours Learning Collaborative, has embarked on a mission to improve children’s health through nutrition and physical activity. Our menus now offer varied, nutritious, ethnic foods that the children enjoy. Parents have expressed that while at home, their children talk about healthy habits and choose to eat fruits and vegetables as opposed to less nutritious snacks.”*

– Maria Matos, Executive Director, Latin American Community Center

## Key Regulations Related to Nutrition and Physical Activity

The following is a summary of key regulations that promote healthy eating and physical activity in the child care setting:

### Nutrition

- Only 100% fruit juice may be served, and only one serving per day is allowed. No juice is allowed for infants under one year of age.
- Only low-fat (1% or non-fat) milk may be served to children over two years of age.
- Calories from fat are limited to no more than 35% of total calories in fried and pre-fried meats and fruits/vegetables.
- Calories from sugar are limited in sweet grain products and cereals.
- Whole grains are required one time each day.

### Physical Activity

- For every three hours a child is in a child care program, 20 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical exercise will be planned and implemented.
- While awake, infants are limited to 30 minutes of time spent in swings, strollers and other confining equipment.
- Use of television, video games, etc. is prohibited for children under age two and limited to no more than one hour for older children. Parent permission is required for the use of any media.



## Notes

1. Numerous studies demonstrate that malnutrition, even with no clinical signs, affects academic performance. See: Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy, *Statement on the Link between Nutrition and Cognitive Development in Children*, Medford, MA: Tufts University School of Nutrition.
2. American Academy of Pediatrics. *Bright futures: Guidelines for health supervision of infants, children and adolescents*, Third Edition, 2008, p. 116.
3. HL Burdette, RC Whitaker, Resurrecting free play in young children, *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 2005; 159: 46-50.
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity* (Rockville, MD: 2001).
5. Nemours Health & Prevention Services. *2008 Delaware Survey of Children's Health*.
6. Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. *2007 National Survey of Children's Health*, Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health website. Retrieved 1/27/11 from [www.nschdata.org](http://www.nschdata.org).
7. The 2009 Delaware Child Care Provider Survey was administered in the fall of 2009 among a stratified random sample of licensed child care centers that are representative of Delaware's population of 450 child care centers spread in all three counties. Survey responses were received from directors and teachers in 146 centers.
8. Nemours Health & Prevention Services. *2009 Delaware Child Care Provider Survey: Results and Findings*.
9. Nemours Health & Prevention Services. *2009 Delaware Child Care Provider Survey: Results and Findings*.
10. Nemours Health & Prevention Services. *2009 Delaware Child Care Provider Survey: Results and Findings*.