

ANNOUNCEMENT

C- 24-01



Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning
Bureau of Certification and Bureau of Policy & Professional Development

Issue Date: 06/17/2024

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Subject: Guidance to Identifying Toxic Plants in the Child Care Setting

To: All DHS Certified Child Care Facilities
Early Learning Resource Centers
Office of Child Development and Early Learning Staff

From: Shante' A. Brown 
Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development & Early Learning

PURPOSE

To clarify the intent of 55 Pa. Code §§ 3270.66(d), 3280.66(c), and 3290.64(c) – Toxics, as it pertains to plants. To provide information on where a provider can find information on plant identification, identifying if a plant is toxic, symptoms of contact with a toxic plant, and information on steps to take if a child encounters a toxic plant.

BACKGROUND

The United States is home to over 700 toxic plants. Plants that are not native to the United States can also be purchased at local garden centers, florists, or online. Some of these plants may also be toxic. As stated in 55 Pa. Code §§ 3270.66(d), 3280.66(c) and 3290.64(c), toxic plants are not permitted in a child care space. This includes both indoor and outdoor child care and play space. It also includes areas that may be accessible to children but are not child care or play space, such as hallways, bathrooms, kitchens, or offices inside of the child care facility.

DISCUSSION

Before bringing a new plant into the indoor or outdoor child care or play space, the provider should identify the plant and do research to determine if any part(s) of the plant is toxic. If any part(s) of the plant is toxic, it may not be included in the child care setting. Plants intended to grow a product meant for human consumption containing toxic or poisonous parts (including but not limited to, tomato, potato, rhubarb etc.) may be grown and be accessible to children. Children must be actively supervised by a qualified staff person when having access to such plants. The provider is responsible for identifying all plants currently in both the indoor and

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outdoor child care and play spaces, as well as any areas accessible to children inside of the facility. If a plant or any part of the plant is toxic it must be removed, not including plants that are grown for human consumption that may have parts that are toxic. During each inspection, the Certification Representative shall assess for toxic plants in all areas of the facility accessible to children, including areas that may be accessible to children but are not child care or play space, such as hallways, bathrooms, kitchens, or offices inside of the child care facility. If a toxic plant(s) is found to be present in the indoor and/or outdoor child care or play space, the provider will be cited under 55 Pa. Code §§ 3270.66(d), 3280.66(c), or 3290.64(c). If a toxic plant is found to be accessible to children including areas that may be accessible to children but are not child care or play space, such as hallways, bathrooms, kitchens, or offices inside of the child care facility, the provider will be cited under 55 Pa Code §§ 3270.66(a), 3280.66(a), or 3290.64(a). The Certification Representative will request a plan of correction from the provider.

Identifying a plant can be difficult since many plants look similar. If you are unsure of the identity of a plant, you can take a part of the plant to your local garden center or florist for help to identify the plant. Your county extension office can also aid you in identifying plants. You can locate your county extension office by using this website:

<https://extension.psu.edu/county-offices>

There are online resources and applications that allow you to take a picture of the plant and upload the picture to their website. Once the picture is uploaded, the site will identify the plant using the picture provided. The following are three free resources that can help you identify a plant:

Pl@nt Net - <https://identify.plantnet.org/>

Plant ID - <https://plant.id/>

Google Lens - <https://lens.google.com/>

Once a plant is identified, it needs to be determined if any part of the plant is toxic. There are several sources available to advise if a plant is toxic. Please see [Appendix A](#) for a list of available sites that have lists of toxic plants.

Toxic plants can cause a reaction via touch, ingestion, or inhalation. A child's reaction to encountering a toxic plant is based on the plant's toxicity level, the amount ingested, the length of contact, the amount and duration of the inhalation, and the age and weight of the child. Reactions to exposure to a toxic plant may include one or more of the following: skin irritations, abdominal pain/nausea/vomiting, watering, or burning of the eyes, difficulty breathing, dilated pupils, slow/high pulse, headache, sore throat, drowsiness, swelling/itching, or death. In the event a child or staff has exposure to a toxic plant, you should contact the **Poison Control Center (800-222-1222)** for guidance. If possible, save a piece of the plant for identification purposes. As stated in 55 Pa. Code §§ 3270.74, 3280.74, and 3290.72, Emergency telephone numbers - the telephone number of the nearest hospital, police department, fire department, ambulance, and poison control center shall be posted by each telephone in the facility. In the event of an emergency, you should also call 911.

This Announcement does not prohibit all plants in the child care space. Non-toxic plants may be present in both the indoor and outdoor child care space.

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NEXT STEPS

1. Read this Announcement and share with appropriate staff.
2. Identify the plants in the child care facility.
3. Determine which plants are safe to remain in both the indoor and outdoor child care spaces, and all other areas inside the facility accessible to children for toxic plants.
4. Remove all toxic plants from the indoor and outdoor child care space and all other areas inside the facility accessible to children. Not including the plants that are grown for human consumption that may have parts that are toxic.
5. Research the toxicity of all plants before they are brought into the child care space, outdoor play space, or areas inside the facility accessible to children.
6. Contact your Regional Office with any questions or concerns.

Comments and Questions regarding this announcement should be directed to the child care provider's Regional Office of Child Development and Early Learning:

Central Region 800-222-2117

Northeast Region 800-222-2108

Southeast North and Southeast South Region 800-346-2929

Western Region 800-222-2149

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Appendix A - Websites with Lists of Toxic Plants

Agency	Website	Information Provided
Caring for Our Children	https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/even-plants-can-be-poisonous.pdf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toxic Plants • Common Name • Botanical Name
ProGarden Tips - 25 Poisonous Plants in Pennsylvania	25 Poisonous Plants in Pennsylvania - ProGardenTips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toxic Plants • Common Name • Scientific Name • Pictures • Symptoms
Poison Control - National Capital Poison Control Center	https://www.poison.org/articles/plant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toxic Plants • Common Name • Botanical Name • Pictures
Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia – Poison Control Center	https://www.chop.edu/centers-programs/poison-control-center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate Articles for Each Category • Toxic Plants