

April Is Water Safety Month in Texas

Child Care Licensing is a division of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). It regulates and monitors child care operations in Texas. For more information about child care licensing and its services, visit www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_care.

The 83rd Legislature, Regular Session, passed a resolution making the month of April Water Safety Month for the next 10 years to create water safety awareness and prevent water-related injuries and deaths. We encourage you and your staff to review water safety measures and share this information with the families of the children in your care.

Water activities are a good way to cool off and get the children involved in physically active play. But close supervision is a must. Drowning is the leading cause of accidental death among infants, toddlers, and young children. It takes only a few minutes and can happen when you least expect it. Many people mistakenly believe a drowning child will struggle in the water and make a lot of noise. The opposite is often true—the child may slip silently under water.

WATER ACTIVITIES ARE A GOOD WAY TO COOL OFF AND GET THE CHILDREN INVOLVED IN PHYSICALLY ACTIVE PLAY.

Provide close supervision during water activities, even if the children are just playing on the playground with a sprinkler. Make sure that sprinkler or water hose play is away from hard, slippery surfaces such as driveways, sidewalks, patios, and playground equipment. Be sure to store the equipment out of children's reach when it's not in use.

If you use a wading or splashing pool (2 feet of water or less), you must provide extra adult supervision. The number of additional adults depends on the age and number of children participating. The required ratios and group sizes are in the minimum

standards that apply to your program (See Subchapter E Child/Caregiver Ratios and Group Sizes). Wading pools must be emptied, sanitized, and stored out of children's reach after use at the end of each day.

When children in your care go swimming, a certified lifeguard must be on duty at all times. All caregivers counted in the ratio must be able to swim and be ready to rescue a child.

If you share a pool with people who aren't associated with your program, make sure you have a supervision plan to maximize the safety of the children in your care both in and out of the water. Items that can help you keep track of each child might include the use of brightly colored wristbands or the creative application of colored zinc oxide, an effective sun block.

Use these resources to help ensure water safety: Watch Kids Around Water: www.dfps.state.tx.us/Watch_Kids_Around_Water/.

Water Safety Guide from Safe Kids USA: www.safekids.org/safety-basics/safety-guide/water-safety-guide/.

Pool Safety from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission: www.poolsafely.gov/. ■

Electronic child safety alarm requirements

Child Care Licensing is a division of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). It regulates and monitors child care operations in Texas. For more information about child care licensing and its services, visit www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_care.

The Texas Legislature passed a law during the 83rd regular session that requires a licensed child care center to equip each vehicle used to transport children with an electronic child safety alarm system if the vehicle meets two conditions:

- it's designed to seat eight or more persons (including the driver) and
- it was purchased or leased on or after Dec. 31, 2013.

Please note that this requirement applies only to licensed child care centers. Use of the electronic child safety alarms is recommended but not required for licensed child care homes, registered child care homes, before- and after-school programs, and school-age programs.

Here are some commonly asked questions about the requirement:

What is an electronic child safety alarm? It is an alarm system installed in a vehicle that prompts the driver to inspect the vehicle to determine whether any children are in the vehicle before the driver gets out.

How do I use the alarm? The alarm must be used at all times according to the manufacturer's instructions whenever you are transporting a child in care. You are expected to follow the manufacturer's instructions for maintenance as well as use. Licensing recommends that you keep a copy of the manufacturer's instructions on file at your center and go over the instructions with all employees who transport children.

What documentation must I keep on file? You must have documentation that shows when your center first purchased or leased a vehicle, unless the vehicle is:

- already equipped with an electronic child safety alarm; or
- designed to seat fewer than eight persons.

What is acceptable documentation on a vehicle's purchase or lease date? Acceptable documentation includes the vehicle title, lease contract, or paperwork from the vehicle dealer that includes the date of purchase or lease. This documentation must be kept on file and available for review by Licensing upon request during hours of operation.

Where can I get a copy of the vehicle title? You may obtain a copy of the vehicle history from the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles at <http://txdmv.gov>. Please note there is a fee for this service.

What if I rent a vehicle to use? If your center rents a vehicle for short-term use, such as a single field trip or only a few days' use, the alarm is not required.

Can I get a discount on my insurance? Possibly. Check with your center's vehicle insurance company.

Where can I purchase an alarm? Licensing recommends that you contact the dealer from whom you purchased your vehicle.

Please note that the department cannot endorse a specific product. It is your operation's responsibility to determine which device best meets your needs.

The following resources will help you explore safety alarm options.

Child Check Mate/Child Check-Mate Systems:
www.childcheckmate.com.

Bus-Scan/Robotics Technologies: www.roboticstech.com.

Sleeping Child Check Monitor/Doran Manufacturing: www.doranmfg.com.

Kiddie Voice/ATWEC Technologies: www.atwec.com. ■