



## Ohio Administrative Code

### Rule 5180:2-12-11 Indoor and outdoor space requirements for a licensed child care center.

Effective: July 1, 2026

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(A) What are the indoor space requirements for a center?

- (1) There shall be at least thirty-five square feet of approved, usable wall-to-wall indoor floor space for each child that the center is licensed to serve.
- (2) Spaces used to care for children less than two and one half years of age are to:
  - (a) Be approved by the Ohio department of children and youth (DCY) prior to use for the care of children younger than two and one half years of age.
  - (b) Provide at least thirty-five square feet of floor space for each child per room or area.
- (3) Usable indoor floor space shall not include bathrooms, hallways, storage rooms or other areas not used for child care.
- (4) Bathrooms may be included if they are used exclusively by children enrolled in the center.
- (5) Areas included in the center's square footage shall be exclusively available for child care during all operating hours of the child care program.
- (6) If the center is in a shared building, the center may identify a back-up space that is available for use on days the primary space is not available. When the back-up space is utilized, the space shall only be used for child care during that time and shall have building and fire approval.
- (7) The public may use areas such as entry ways, hallways, bathrooms and other areas normally available for public use if such access does not constitute a risk or hazard to the health and safety of the children in care.
- (8) The calculation of indoor space may include hallways, kitchens, storage areas and bathrooms not used exclusively by children and other areas not available for child care if either of the following apply:
  - (a) The center's license has been maintained since September 1, 1986; or
  - (b) A new license was issued due to the change of ownership of the center that was previously licensed prior to September 1, 1986.
- (9) Dividers may be used to divide a room into smaller spaces to serve additional groups of children, provided the center ensures that the space maintains the indoor space square footage requirement pursuant to paragraph (A)(1) of this rule.



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If used, dividers are to:

- (a) Meet any requirements set by the department of commerce, local building department, state fire marshal or local fire safety inspector.
- (b) Be made of non-porous material or other material that can be cleaned and sanitized.

(B) What are the on-site outdoor space requirements for a center?

(1) The center shall have an on-site outdoor space that:

- (a) Provides at least sixty square feet of usable space per child using the area at one time.
- (b) Ensures that children are not able to leave the outdoor play area unsupervised and ensures that any hazards from the outside cannot enter the outdoor play area without the staff being aware of them. Outdoor space is protected from traffic or animals by one or more of the following:
  - (i) A continuous fence in good condition with functioning gates.
  - (ii) A continuous natural barrier.
  - (iii) A combination of fence and natural barrier.
- (c) Has functional latches on gates which cannot be easily opened by young children if gates are used. Gates shall not be locked when children are present at the center.
- (d) Provides access to bathroom facilities and drinking water during play times.
- (e) Is inspected by staff daily and determined to be free of foreign objects and trash during times children are outside playing. A trash can with a lid is permitted in the play area if it is emptied daily and kept in clean condition.

(2) Protects children under six months from direct exposure to the sun. Provides sun protection for all children.

(3) Bodies of water (other than water tables designed for children to play in only with their hands) shall be separated from the play area by a fence or other physical barrier (the center door only is not a sufficient barrier) that prevents children from accessing the water.

(C) What are the exemptions for having an on-site outdoor space?



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A center may be exempt from having an on-site outdoor space if both of the following apply:

- (1) The center has an indoor recreation area that has a minimum of one thousand four hundred forty square feet of space that is separate from the indoor space required by this rule and is regularly available and scheduled for daily use.
- (2) There is a safe park or play area regularly available, scheduled for daily use in suitable weather where the distance and means to access the off-site play area is safe and developmentally appropriate..

(D) What are the on-site outdoor equipment requirements for a center?

- (1) Outdoor equipment, whether stationary or portable, shall be safe and designed to meet the developmental needs of all of the age groups of children using the space.
- (2) Equipment, such as, but not limited to, climbing gyms, swings, and slides shall:
  - (a) Be free of conditions that pose a risk of harm to children.
  - (b) Be placed out of the path of the area's main traffic pattern.
  - (c) Be anchored or stable and have all parts in good working order and securely fastened.
  - (d) Have all climbing ropes anchored at both ends and not capable of looping back on themselves creating a loop with an interior perimeter of five inches or greater.
  - (e) Have "S" hooks that are closed in order to prevent the chain from slipping off of the hook and prevents strangulation if they are used.
  - (f) Have no openings that are greater than three and one half inches, but less than nine inches to avoid entrapment of the head or other body parts.
  - (g) Have protected barriers on platforms that are thirty inches high or higher. A protective barrier means an enclosing device around an elevated platform that is intended to prevent both inadvertent and deliberate attempts to pass through the device.
  - (h) Be assembled, installed and utilized according to manufacturer's guidelines.



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- (3) Functionally linked play equipment may be used if each piece of the adjacent equipment is not more than twelve inches apart for preschool-age children or eighteen inches apart for school-age children. Functionally linked play equipment means two or more play structures designed and installed adjacently to create one integral unit that provides more than one play activity for children.

(E) What are the on-site fall zone requirements for a center?

- (1) Equipment used for climbing, swinging, balancing and sliding should not be placed over, or immediately next to, hard surfaces such as asphalt, concrete, dirt, grass, or flooring covered by carpet or gym mats not intended for use as surfacing for climbing equipment.
- (2) All pieces of playground equipment should be placed over and surrounded by a shock-absorbing surface.
- (3) All loose fill materials must be raked to retain their proper distribution, shock-absorbing properties and to remove foreign material. This standard applies whether the equipment is installed outdoors or indoors.
- (4) All space around equipment designed for or observed being used for climbing, swinging, balancing or sliding shall extend a minimum of six feet in all directions from the perimeter of the equipment or a minimum of three feet in all directions if the equipment is exclusively used by children six months to twenty-three months of age.
  - (a) The fall zone for moving or swinging equipment is measured from the point of furthest extension.
  - (b) The fall zone between two stationary pieces of equipment shall be a minimum of nine feet. For equipment exclusively used by children six months to twenty-three months of age, the fall zone requirement is four and one-half feet.
  - (c) Fall zones shall be kept clear of all obstacles that children could run into or fall on top of including retaining devices such as, but not limited to, fencing, walls, landscape timbers and mulch retaining walls.
  - (d) Equipment used for climbing shall not be placed over carpet or mats that are not intended for use as surfacing for climbing equipment.
- (5) Centers licensed as of January 1, 2007 that have fall zones meeting the requirements listed in paragraph (E)(1) of this rule are exempt from the



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requirements of (E)(2) of this rule, unless stationary equipment designed for or are observed being used for climbing, swinging, bouncing or sliding is added, replaced or relocated. When this type of equipment is added, replaced or relocated the center is to comply with the requirements of paragraphs (E)(1) and (E)(2) of this rule for all pieces of equipment designed or observed used for climbing, swinging, bouncing or sliding on that playground.

(F) What are the requirements for play areas used by a center that are regulated by another state or local agency?

On-site or off-site play areas that are regulated by another state or local agency are exempt from the DCY requirements for outdoor spaces, playground equipment, and fall zones. Centers are to protect children from harm while using these exempted play areas, including but not limited to, protection from traffic and animals; preventing child access to bodies of water; limiting direct sun exposure for infants; and providing sun protection for all children.