



Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education

Planning. Guidance. Protection.



Over 8 million kids go to daycares and other early childcare centers in the United States. But most states don't have formal processes to assess these sites for harmful chemicals and determine, for example, if they are on or near old gas stations, factories, or dry cleaners. That's why ATSDR* created the Choose Safe Places program—to help towns, cities, and states adopt practices that will make sure early childcare and education centers are located away from chemical hazards.

Why do states and cities need help with this issue?

Some states have licensing regulations for early care centers to prevent hazardous conditions or practices that may harm children. But most don't require environmental assessments of the site or area. So, even if a center meets the regulations, the building might still be located in a place where children and staff can be exposed to environmental contamination such as mercury, lead, or radon.

For example, a center might open in a chemically contaminated industrial building that wasn't cleaned up, or next door to a business using harmful chemicals. This puts staff and children, who are more sensitive to the effects of chemicals, at risk of health problems.



Have you heard the term "safe siting"?

"Safe siting" is the public health term that describes practices and policies used to locate early care and education centers in places free of chemical and physical hazards. This includes careful consideration of

- Former site use
- Nearby sites and nearby activities
- Naturally occurring contamination
- Safe drinking water

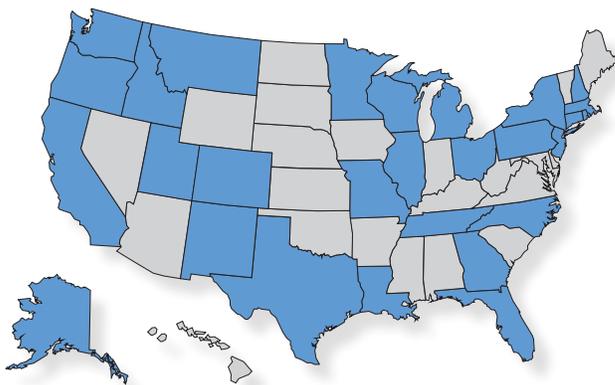


How does our Choose Safe Places program work?

We developed free, practical online tools to help everyone involved with establishing new early care and education centers choose safe locations. We also provide funding, technical support, and guidance to help states start their own safe siting programs.



Safe Siting Tools on Our Website	People or Groups Who Can Use Our Tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive guidance manual • Program development checklist • Planning tool • Educational materials (e.g., infographic, fact sheet, video) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare facility owners and operators • City planners • Zoning officials • Licensing agencies • Public health professionals



What about funding?

We also provide some funding for safe siting to 28 states. ATSDR has a long-standing cooperative agreement program called APPLETREE* that helps keep communities safe from environmental contamination. In 2017, we expanded the scope of APPLETREE to include safe siting activities. The cooperative agreement now

- Requires first time APPLETREE recipients to define how locations for early care programs are selected, develop methods to ensure these programs are placed on safe sites, and implement a pilot Choose Safe Places program.
- Requires previously funded states to enhance their Choose Safe Places pilot program and plan for long-term sustainability.



How Idaho Avoided Potentially Dangerous Exposures

Idaho is piloting a voluntary Choose Safe Places program to encourage providers to use a property checklist when considering a site for their childcare business. The checklist outlines potential environmental exposures.

In late 2019, a provider used the checklist to evaluate a potential childcare site formerly used as a gas station. During this process, they discovered that the gas station had not been remediated. They decided not to open their business in this location. Instead, they are looking for a better site so the kids who go to this childcare center will not be exposed to harmful chemicals. If Idaho had not used this property checklist as part of their Choose Safe Places program, the center may have unknowingly opened in a former gas station building, potentially exposing children to contaminants left behind.



How New York Increased Required Radon Testing for Early Care and Education Centers

The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and New York State Office of Children and Family Services (NYSOCFS) developed a program to improve and refine environmental hazard evaluation during licensing for early care and education centers. New York requires radon testing as part of the licensing process in areas with high radon levels. As part of a partnership, the two organizations determined that the list of high-radon areas was outdated.

In 2019, the NYSOCFS updated the list of high-radon areas. The expanded list now includes 192 more early care centers in 45 cities, towns, or villages. The NYSOCFS now requires these new locations to test for radon as part of their licensing process. Ultimately, this protects thousands of children where they learn and play.



A Note about Collaboration

Our Choose Safe Places program promotes better choices about where early care and education programs are located—so that children are protected where they learn and play. There is no single or simple solution to reduce children's risk of exposure to dangerous chemicals during their care. For that reason, our tools and guidance encourage collaboration.

When different professionals and agencies collaborate, states see system-level changes that, for example:

- **Integrate** environmental considerations for licensing
- **Improve** early care providers' understanding and actions to choose safe locations
- **Build** the infrastructure and capacity needed to sustain programs

**Learn more about ATSDR's
Choose Safe Places program:**

www.atsdr.cdc.gov/safeplacesforECE

Notes:

* ATSDR, or the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, is a federal agency that protects the health of the nation from toxic substances in the environment and is committed to promoting the healthy development of children where they live, learn, and play. Learn more at www.atsdr.cdc.gov.

* APPLETREE is the acronym for "ATSDR's Partnership to Promote Local Efforts to Reduce Environmental Exposure." Learn more about this cooperative agreement program at www.atsdr.cdc.gov/states.