

Daycare Licensing Requirements

What are daycare licensing requirements?

Daycare licensing requirements are **state rules** that child care programs must meet to legally operate. Licensing exists to help ensure **health and safety standards** are followed in child care settings.

How do I find my state's official licensing requirements?

Because licensing rules vary by state, the best first step is to go to the CDC's "ECE State Licensing" page and use it to locate your state's licensing information.

- Start here:
<https://www.cdc.gov/early-care-education/php/state-childcare-licensing/index.html>
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Common licensing requirement categories (most states include these)

1) Program type, ages served, and capacity

Most states set different rules depending on whether you are a:

- **Child care center**
- **Family child care home**
- **Group home**
- **License-exempt** (in some situations)

Your state licensing office will define what category you fall under and which rules apply.

2) Health and safety policies



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Licensing commonly expects written policies and daily practices that support children’s health in group settings. CDC’s Early Care and Education resources are a reliable place to anchor this section.

Examples of policy topics many programs include:

- illness and exclusion practices (when children/staff should stay home)
 - cleaning/sanitizing routines
 - hand hygiene and basic infection prevention
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3) Immunization and records

Many states require documentation of children’s immunizations for child care entry (or a valid exemption if allowed). CDC explains that state vaccination laws often apply to **day care facilities**, and it links to state requirements.

- Helpful reference:
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/php/requirements-laws/state-vaccination-requirements.html>
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4) Infant safe sleep requirements (if you serve babies)

If a program serves infants, licensing often includes safe sleep expectations. NICHD’s Safe to Sleep® guidance is a strong public-domain anchor for safe sleep language and staff training expectations.

- Safe sleep hub: <https://safetosleep.nichd.nih.gov/>
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5) Emergency preparedness

Many licensing agencies require an emergency plan and regular practice (like drills). FEMA offers a free child care–specific preparedness course (IS-36.A) to support hazard planning for child care sites.

- FEMA course: <https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-36.a&lang=en>



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The Office of Head Start’s Emergency Preparedness Manual is also an excellent reference for what “preparedness” means in early childhood programs.

- Manual start:
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices/emergency-preparedness-manual-early-childhood-programs/chapter-1-introduction>
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6) Inclusion and serving children with disabilities

Licensing and program policies commonly include non-discrimination and inclusion expectations. The ED + HHS joint policy statement supports inclusion of children with disabilities in high-quality early childhood programs and is a strong federal reference for your resource.

- Policy page:
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/policy-statement-inclusion-of-children-with-disabilities-in-early-childhood-programs/>

For practical training/coaching support, Abilities Network (Project ACT) describes training, coaching, and technical assistance for child care educators (state-based, but useful as a model of support).

- Example support page:
<https://abilitiesnetwork.org/who-we-help/early-childhood-educators/>
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A simple “Licensing Requirements” checklist (state-neutral)

Use this as a quick section in your resource:

- Identify your **program type** and correct licensing category
- Locate your state’s licensing site using CDC’s directory
- Gather required **program policies** (health/safety, illness, emergency, inclusion)
- Prepare **recordkeeping systems** (children’s files, staff files, training logs)
- Plan for **immunization documentation** (or allowable exemptions)



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- If serving infants: confirm **safe sleep** practices align with evidence-based guidance
- Complete or document **emergency preparedness training** and plans
- Review inclusion supports and resources to serve children with disabilities well

(Your state will define the exact forms and thresholds, but this checklist helps people organize.)



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