

What the Experts Say

Cold Weather Play

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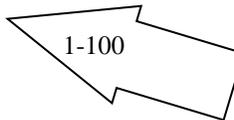
WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

When the weather is cold, parents and teachers worry about its affects on children during outside play. Teachers are often in a bind knowing that outside play is important to the quality of early childhood care and education, and wanting to be responsive to parents' requests.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

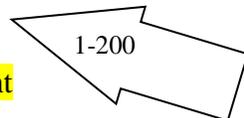
Colds and Flu

As cooler weather and the cold and flu season approach each year, the discussion on causes of colds and flu reignites. **Although it has been known for years that viruses cause these illnesses**, the debate regarding the effects of cold weather continues. According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, getting chilled does not cause colds.¹ They attribute the increased incident of colds to the fact that people are in closer proximity for longer periods of time due to staying inside more during the winter months. Colds are caused by viruses and passed from one individual to another, usually through direct contact, by sharing objects such as utensils or handkerchiefs, or coughs and sneezes.² However, conventional wisdom maintains getting chilled will cause a cold. Therefore, some parents ask schools and day care centers to keep their children inside during cold weather. This puts teachers in a bind as it is in opposition to childcare licensing and educational mandates for daily outdoor play.



Teachers well understand educational and quality care requirements. In clarifying items on the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, Harms and Cryer³ state,

The term "weather permitting" is used in several items of the scale with regard to when children can participate in outdoor activities. **"Weather permitting" means almost every day, unless there is active precipitation, extremely hot or cold conditions, or public announcements advising people to remain indoors due to weather conditions, such as high levels of pollution, extreme cold, or heat that might cause health problems.** It is sometimes said, "there is no bad weather; only bad clothes." Therefore, children should be dressed properly and taken outdoors on most days, which might require that the schedule be changed to allow children outdoor play in the early morning when the temperature will be very hot later in the day.



Or, it might require that the program ensure that children have boots and a change of clothes for a day when the grass is wet. After bad weather, staff should check the outdoor area, dry off equipment, sweep away water, or block off puddles, etc. as needed before children go out.³

Bundling Up in Cold Weather

To add to the debate, many children are reluctant to wear their coats or keep them zipped. In addition, adults sometimes bundle children in too much clothing causing them to perspire, which results in wet clothing, hair, and skin.

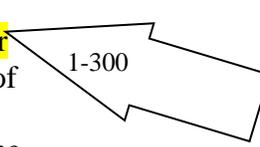
Parents and teachers are often faced with children refusing to wear or leave on their coats. Pediatricians say that the issue may be the child's developing control over sensory processing rather than defiance or stubbornness. Kids would rather be the way they came into the world—naked. As they adapt to the world of clothing, extra layers—particularly coats—add to their heightened perception of constriction.⁴

Another reason that children don't wear their coats is that they are usually active—running, shouting, throwing, climbing, just as an adult who takes a jog in cold weather doesn't need as many layers as someone who is just standing around. Some scientists say children probably don't need bundling up as much as we grown-ups fear they do. Of course, this does not apply in extreme temperatures. Sometimes parents and teachers must step in and take charge.

As children reach school age, there is a need for increasing independence. Since children learn through experience, experience and logic are great teachers. A child who refuses to wear a coat and ends up wet and uncomfortably chilly may think twice the next time their parent suggests wearing a coat.⁴

A recent study found some truth may exist in the folklore that colds and cold weather are related. Researchers exposed participants to cold germs. Half of the participants soaked their feet in ice water for 20 minutes and half did not. Over the next 2 to 5 days, the participants reported whether or not they were suffering from cold symptoms. More participants (14.4%) who soaked their feet in ice water reported symptoms than those who did not (5.6%). These results suggest there may be some relationship between the common cold and being chilled.⁵ Researchers suspect that this may be due to the cold temperature constricting blood vessels in the nasal cavity, which may restrict the number of white cells (infection fighters) present.² One theory is that many people carry traces of rhinoviruses—the germ responsible for the common cold—in the backs of their noses. Exposure to chilly temperatures causes blood vessels in the nose to constrict, reducing the flow of the immune system's white blood cells. The virus flourishes and triggers cold symptoms. However, this research, which measured symptoms only, has been criticized for failure to determine if a virus was ever present.⁴

A study in the 1968 *New England Journal of Medicine* remains the standard on cold weather and the common cold. Volunteers were infected with a cold virus, then chilled, and checked for symptoms. The study showed that dampness and cool temperatures did not increase the chance or severity of a cold.⁴ Additionally, recent research indicates psychological stress is associated with increased risk for developing upper respiratory



1-300

illnesses.⁶ People with more social ties and social support have been found to be less susceptible to common colds.⁷

Outdoor Play Provides Many Health Benefits

According to the Center for Disease Control,⁸ there are many health benefits of outdoor play for children.

Infectious disease organisms are less concentrated in outdoor air than indoor air.

- Light exposure of the skin to sunlight promotes the production of Vitamin D that growing children require.
- Open spaces in outdoor areas encourage children to develop gross and fine motor skills in ways that are difficult to duplicate indoors.
- Physically active play reduces stress in children.

Determining Weather-Related Health Risks

Childcare programs should use information from local weather and air quality reports to make appropriate decisions regarding outside play. Be aware that children do not adapt to temperature extremes as well as adults. **Children produce proportionately more body heat than adults when walking or running.** They also have a lower sweating capacity and cannot dissipate body heat by evaporation as effectively as adults.⁹ Therefore, it is important for adults to monitor children when outside during extreme temperatures.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children play outdoors daily when weather and air quality conditions do not pose significant health risks.

The AAP Early Education and Child Care Initiatives include information regarding outdoor play in child care.⁹ The AAP policies on child care health and safety issues can be found in the manual *Caring for Our Children: Health and Safety Performance Standards, Guideline for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs*.⁹

Following is a summary of their recommendations:

Outdoor Play is Important All Year Around.

- Children should play outdoors when weather and air quality conditions do not pose a significant health risk. **Weather posing significant health risks includes the following:**
 - ◇ **Wind chill at or below 15 degrees Fahrenheit.**
 - ◇ **Heat index at or above 90 degrees Fahrenheit.**
 - ◇ Air quality conditions posing significant health risks are identified by announcements from local health authorities or through ozone (smog) alerts. This information is particularly important for children with respiratory health problems, such as asthma.

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Warm Weather Precautions

- Protect children from the sun by using shade, sun-protective clothing, and sunscreen with UVB-ray and UVA-ray protection of SPF-15 or higher. Obtain parental permission to apply sunscreen to children prior to extended outdoor play.
- Ensure children are well-hydrated. Provide water before and during outside play.

Cold-Weather Precautions

- Encourage parents to layer children's clothing and provide hats and mittens.
- While outside, check children's face and extremities every 15 minutes to ensure normal color and temperature.
- Remind parents to label children's coats, hats, etc., with their names.
- Make sure kids' coats are zipped and that they have adequate head covering when going out in cold weather.
- While outside, check children's extremities every 15 minutes to ensure they are not getting sweaty under too much bundling.
- Check the weather report for extreme temperatures and limit outside time if necessary.
- Provide parents with community resources for reduced or free children's clothing, including outer wear.
- Keep extra hats, mittens, and coats in the classroom to quickly address the problem of lost or forgotten items.

RESOURCES

Childcare Weather Watch Guidelines

www.idph.state.ia.us/hcci/common/pdf/weatherwatch.pdf

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*Quick Reference***COLD WEATHER PLAY****01-A1****Parent Messages**

- Outdoor play provides many health benefits for children.
- Children should be allowed to play outside in cold weather with appropriate clothing and adult monitoring.
- Community resources are available for cold weather clothes.

Parent Skills

- Allows and encourages children to play outside in all seasons.
- Dresses children in layered clothing appropriate for outside or inside play.
- Labels children's outerwear (hats, mittens, coats, etc.).
- Accesses community resources when in need of outerwear for children.

*Parent Tip***COLD WEATHER PLAY**

Dear Parents,

Playing outside is healthy for me. I need to play outside all year, even in cold weather. Pediatricians recommend kids play outside in all seasons. When the temperature is less than 40 degrees, check my hands every 15 minutes for normal color and warmth and limit the amount of time outside as needed.

- Outdoor air has fewer germs than indoor air.
- Even small amounts of sunlight help my body make Vitamin D that helps me grow.
- Outdoors, I can run, jump, climb, and shout – things I get in trouble for indoors, but need to do to be strong and healthy.
- Letting me be noisy and active gets rid of stress and helps me mind better, sleep better, and can mean fewer colds.

Thanks,
Your Child

JUEGO EN TIEMPO FRÍO

Queridos Padres,

Jugar afuera es saludable para mí. Yo necesito jugar afuera todo el año, aun en tiempo frío. Los pediatras recomiendan que los niños jueguen afuera en todas las temporadas. Cuando la temperatura es menor de 40 grados, cheque mis manos cada 15 minutos para que estén de color normal y calido y limiten el tiempo de juego afuera según la necesidad.

- El aire libre tiene menos gérmenes que los recintos cerrados.
- Aun cantidades pequeñas de sol ayudan a mi cuerpo a producir la vitamina D que me ayuda a crecer.
- Al aire libre puedo correr, saltar, trepar y gritar. Estas son cosas que me ponen en problemas cuando las hago dentro de la casa pero necesito hacerlas para ser fuerte y sano.
- Dejarme ser ruidoso y activo me libra del estrés y me ayuda a mejorar la memoria y a dormir mejor y puede significar menos resfriados.

Gracias,
Su Hijo