



**Georgia Dept  
of Early Care  
and Learning**  
BRIGHT FROM THE START



# Child Care Services Spring 2025 Newsletter

Dear Child Care Provider,

As of January 1, 2025, Child Care Services will no longer approve the half wall, potty pod variance and waiver. All programs submitting applications for licensure must meet the rule requirement to fully enclose all restrooms. This includes change of ownership applications.

Rule 591-1-1-.06(4) of the Bright from the Start Rules for Child Care Learning Centers, requires that the bathroom area be fully enclosed and ventilated to the outside of the building with either an open screened window or functioning exhaust fan and duct system. In Centers first licensed after March 1, 1991, and Centers that remodel or add to existing plumbing facilities, the bathroom area shall be fully enclosed and ventilated to the outside of the building with either an open screened window or functioning exhaust fan and duct system.

Fully enclosed means the bathroom has floor to ceiling walls and full doors. The intent of this rule is to allow children privacy when using the bathroom, to control odors and to prevent the spread of disease.

## **What are Variances and Waivers?**

Variances and waivers allow a rule or regulation to be met through alternate means and standards as long as the intent of the rule is met and the health, safety and care of children is met. Waivers allow a complete exemption from the enforcement of a rule or regulation, but the applicant must prove that the rule's intent and purpose is met through equivalent standards that provide the same level of protection for the health, safety, and care of children. Variances and waivers must be applied for, and the applicant has to show that the strict enforcement of the rule would cause undue hardship (i.e. installing bathroom ventilation in a public-school bathroom).

Variances and waivers go through a multistep process of review and consideration that takes a minimum of 10 business days to complete after submission. Approval of the variance and waiver applications is discretionary and not guaranteed, nor transferable from one license to the other.

All the best,

*Pam Stevens*

Pam Stevens  
Deputy Commissioner  
for Child Care Services



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## Ventilation and Enclosed Bathrooms

Ventilation is necessary for air circulation which clears infectious disease agents, odors, and toxic substances from the air. Restrooms with floor to ceiling walls and full doors aid in odor control and prevent airborne organisms from spreading and contaminating other parts of the child care facility. Exhaust fans must be maintained in good working order and vent to the outside of the building. Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems that have an air exchange with fresh air from outside are approved so long as documentation is kept on file that shows the air exchange is adequate for the space without the need of vent fans. Windows used for ventilation must be operable and have tight-fitting screens without rips, tears, or holes. Staff must consistently open the screened windows during toileting routines to allow for adequate ventilation.



## Criminal Background Checks: Safeguarding Your Workplace

Criminal background checks are a required safety process for all licensed programs. These checks are intended to safeguard your workplace and protect children from the risk of abuse, harm, or neglect. As such, they are critically important. They can literally be the difference between a safe child care environment and an unsafe one.

Criminal background checks are also essential for maintaining good standing with licensing compliance and for remaining open for business. Citations related to not completing the criminal background check process consistently are the most common reason for revocations pursued by DECAL. Revocations are a legal action to take away a provider's license to operate.

Given the vital importance of criminal background checks, we want to help you understand the requirements and process. Below, we address some of the most frequently asked questions about records checks.

# Criminal Records and Comprehensive Background Checks

A satisfactory Fingerprint Records Check Determination or Comprehensive Records Check Determination that is valid and current is required for all employees, provisional employees, potential employees, administrators, and any adults who will be present in the program when children are present and prior to any individuals over age 17 residing in a program. Residents age 17 and older in a program must also have a satisfactory determination prior to and while residing in the program.

## Intent

To protect children from risk of abuse, harm, or neglect.

## What is considered?

In order to provide a safe and secure environment for the children enrolled in the child care program, all reasonable measures must be taken to protect children from the risk of abuse or neglect. Based on this objective, criminal background checks are required for all employees, regardless of age, and all other individuals who are involved with child care.

Comprehensive Records Check Determinations are made by the Department, based upon search results from federal and state entities, including those listed below. A satisfactory determination is required for individuals involved with child care, and it means there has been no reported criminal activity that could negatively pose a risk to children.

### Search Results that Inform the Determination:



#### National Registries

- Federal Bureau of Investigation fingerprint check
- National Crime Information Centers National Sex Offender Registry



#### State Registries

Registries, repositories or databases in the state where the person resides and in each state where such individual resided during the preceding five years:

- criminal registry or repository
- state sex offender registry or repository
- state based child abuse and neglect database



#### State and Federal Laws

Compliance is required with relevant state and federal laws.

## Important Considerations:

### Are children present?

An individual providing services for the child care program with no satisfactory determination or an unsatisfactory determination cannot be onsite when children are present, regardless of whether they are with children or not, and they cannot reside in a program that provides child care.

### Complete prior to hiring and keep up to date.

A satisfactory determination is good for 5 years, as long as the records check clearance date is:

- within the preceding 12 months of the hire date, and
- the employee has not been arrested or charged for any covered crime within that five-year period, and
- the employee has not had a break in service from the child care industry that lasted 6 months or longer anytime in the previous 10 years.

### Use DECAL KOALA.

- Submit background check applications.
- Port each employee's criminal records check determination to the program's profile.





# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Do my cook, driver, and maintenance person need a background check? Also, what about my temporary contract, seasonal, and summer employees and volunteers?**

Yes, all employees of any type or age need a background check, regardless of whether they work directly with children in a classroom or not, including full time, provisional, potential, students in training, part time, administrators, temporary, and contract employees. Volunteers who provide consistent services are considered employees or provisional employees, so if they serve more than once in a 90-day period, they also need background checks. A person who volunteers less than that does not need a background check. All volunteers require close and constant supervision at all times.

## **Do therapists providing services for children need background checks?**

Yes, if they work with the child in the presence of other children. If the therapist signs the child out and works with them individually in an area where no other children are present, they are not required to have a background check.

## **How long can I electronically port satisfactory determinations?**

Porting is available if the date listed as "received on this date" included in the clearance letter is within the preceding 12 months from the hire date.

## **What evidence documents the timeline for satisfactory determinations?**

The following types of documentation may all be considered in establishing a timeline for compliance: employee file, employment application, hire date, time cards, pay stubs, CBC documents (application, registration, out of state affidavit), and signed statements from employees, owner, and/or Director. Regardless, a satisfactory CBC letter issued by DECAL is required prior to an individual being onsite when children are present.

## **Is it enough for the background check to be in progress?**

No. A completed valid and current satisfactory determination is required prior to an employee being hired and renewals for ongoing employees are required prior to expiration.

## **What happens if my program is found to be noncompliant with these requirements?**

When licensing rules are not followed, programs are at an increased risk of violations that could result in a support or deficient compliance status and additional adverse actions, such as revocations. Revocations will be pursued for programs with knowing and intentional criminal records check violations.

## **Have additional questions?**

- For more information, check out our website at: [Criminal Records Checks](#).
- To submit applications or check on the status of applications, access [DECAL KOALA](#).
- For out of state background check questions, email: [Outofstate@decals.ga.gov](mailto:Outofstate@decals.ga.gov).
- For all other questions regarding criminal records check requirements, email: [CRC@decals.ga.gov](mailto:CRC@decals.ga.gov).

*A printable copy of the information included in this article can be downloaded from the DECAL website here: [Criminal Record Checks are Required](#).*

# Preventing Choking in Child Care



Choking is a leading cause of injury and even death in young children. However, this type of incident is preventable with the right knowledge and practices. Joining us on this episode of DECAL Download to talk about the prevention of choking in child care is Pam Stevens, the Deputy Commissioner of Child Care Services, April Rogers, the CCS Director of Enforcement Operations, and Diana Myers, Nutrition and Physical Activity Supervisor.

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Listen](#)

## **Creative & Nutritious Snack Ideas for Child Care: *Beyond Crackers & Cheese***

Looking for snack inspiration that meets CACFP guidelines? This handout offers a variety of quick and easy snack ideas, as well as more hearty and nutritious options to keep your little ones satisfied and energized throughout the day. Keep your snacks safe, healthy, and enjoyable with these creative and delicious ideas!



### **Quick & Easy**

- Cheddar cheese scone with milk (*Grain, Fluid Milk*)

- Graham crackers with berry yogurt *(Grain, Meat/Meat Alternate)*
- Whole grain pancakes with fresh fruits *(Grain, Fruit)*
- Greek yogurt with granola and sliced strawberries *(Meat/Meat Alternate, Grain, Fruit)*
- Whole grain pita with hummus and cucumber slices *(Grain, Meat/Meat Alternate, Vegetable)*
- Oatmeal with diced peaches and a sprinkle of cinnamon *(Grain, Fruit)*
- Whole wheat tortilla with black beans and shredded cheese *(Grain, Meat/Meat Alternate)*
- Whole grain mini bagels with cream cheese and apple slices *(Grain, Fruit)*
- Turkey and cheese roll-ups with thinly sliced cucumber sticks *(Meat/Meat Alternate, Vegetable)*
- Tuna fish on French bread or served with whole grain crackers *(Meat/Meat Alternate, Grain)*

## Hearty & Nutritious

- **DIY Pizza Bagels:** Provide whole grain bagels, tomato sauce, cheese, and various veggie toppings for kids to create their own mini pizzas. *(Grain, Meat/Meat Alternate, Vegetable)*
- **Fruit and Veggie Faces:** Use whole grain crackers (or rice cakes) as the base and let kids create funny faces using a variety of fruits and vegetables. *(Grain, Fruit, Vegetable)*
- **Smoothies:** Blend up a smoothie with fruits, vegetables, and yogurt, then serve as a cool and refreshing treat. *(Fruit, Vegetable, Meat/Meat Alternate)*
- **Fruit & Yogurt Parfait Bar:** Set up a station with plain or low-sugar yogurt, fresh fruits (like strawberries and kiwi), and granola for a build-your-own parfait experience. Kids can help assemble their own parfaits! *(Meat/Meat Alternate, Fruit, Grain)*
- **Rainbow Veggie Cups:** Fill small cups with layers of different colorful vegetables like red bell peppers, yellow corn, green cucumbers, and purple cabbage. Serve with hummus for dipping. *(Vegetable, Meat/Meat Alternate)*
- **Banana Sushi:** Spread a whole grain tortilla with yogurt, place a banana in the center, roll it up, and slice into thin, bite-sized “sushi” pieces. *(Grain, Fruit)*

***Children under the age of 4 are at a high risk of choking while eating. Always supervise children during meals and snacks. Remember to cut food to the appropriate sizes, especially fruits and vegetables, to avoid possible choking.***





## Required Reporting

Child care program personnel are required by law to report any situation in which there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused, neglected, or deprived. Program staff are required to report their concerns within 24 hours or the next work day to the local Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS). Staff must also notify the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) within 24 hours or the next work day whenever a report has been made to DFCS, however, the specifics of the DFCS report are not required.

Child care programs must immediately report notifiable communicable diseases, and any viruses or illnesses identified during a public health emergency to the Department and the local county health department. Reportable illnesses are more serious due to their infectiousness, severity, or frequency of occurrence, and they pose a serious public health threat (or the potential for such threat). The communicable disease chart provides guidance by helping a child care program determine when to report an illness to local county health departments. The chart can be located on DECAL's website at: <http://dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/CommunicableDiseaseChart.pdf>. In situations where more than three persons (within the program or within a classroom) have a non-reportable illness, it is recommended that the program report the illness to the local county health department.

Child care programs must report serious illnesses, incidents, injuries, and other occurrences as specified in the rule requirements to the Department within 24 hours or the next work day. This allows the Department to quickly work with program staff to correct unsafe or unhealthy conditions and to prevent future or additional harm to children. All records (i.e., audio, video, photos, written documentation, social media posts, other electronic information, etc.) associated with the report must be made readily available to the Department to assist in any investigation and inspection and to ensure all attempts were made by the program to correct the incident and prevent it from happening again. In addition, reporting changes to the program's operating status ensures data and record keeping are maintained and current.

All these reports should be submitted electronically through [DECAL KOALA](#).



**Clean Water for Georgia Kids™**



There is **no** safe level of lead in drinking water but exposure is preventable.  
Register for the **Clean Water for Georgia Kids Program** now!



## How child care programs can test for free:

Scan to Enroll:

- ☒ Attend a brief training webinar at <https://bit.ly/3jSMxg6>
- ☒ Enroll at [www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/Georgia](http://www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/Georgia)
- ☒ Collect and ship your water samples, following the instructions in the sampling kit you will receive
- ☒ Receive your results along with any necessary follow-up support and recommendations to address lead concerns.

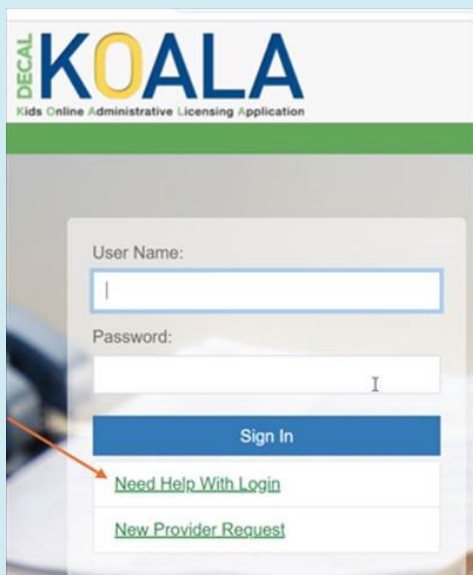


For more information, visit [www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/georgia](http://www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/georgia) or call 1-855-997-3183

## DECAL KOALA: How to Reset Your Password

If you are a licensed, exempt, or informal provider, support center, or owner id account holder and need information on changing your DECAL KOALA password, information can be found in the following steps:

**STEP 1:** From [decalkoala.com](http://decalkoala.com), click 'Need Help With Login'



**STEP 2:** Enter your User ID or unique email address

### Login Help

For help with logging in, enter your **User Name** OR **E-mail Address**

User Name:

I

OR

E-mail:

Continue

Cancel

**STEP 3:** If a User ID or email match, you will receive the message below and the email shown below is sent.

**STEP 4:** The email will contain a 4 digit code

You are receiving this email because you indicated on the DECAL KOALA website that you have forgotten your password.

**User Name:** CCLC-XXXX

Enter the 4-digit code **5035** to change your password.

If you did not initiate this request, please contact DECAL KOALA Support at [decalkoala@decals.ga.gov](mailto:decalkoala@decals.ga.gov) or 404-657-5562.

**STEP 5:** Enter the code and new password.

**STEP 6:** Be sure to add DECAL ([decalkoala@dec.al.ga.gov](mailto:decalkoala@dec.al.ga.gov)) emails to your contact list. This will ensure DECAL emails will not be sent to your junk/spam folder.

## Consumer Product Safety Commission Children's Products Recalls



Sign up today to receive up-to-date email notifications whenever children's products are recalled by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

**[Click Here to Enroll](#)**

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