



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



Child Care Services Spring 2026 Newsletter

Dear Child Care Provider,

I hope you're having a wonderful spring, and I'm sure the children in your program are enjoying the beautiful weather as well! As our outdoor temperatures get warmer and warmer, I want to remind you about DECAL's Look Again Campaign. Every year in Georgia, and across the country, children are left in hot vehicles both at home and at child care programs. We know the best prevention is preparation. Having routine practices that are always followed, without exception, ensures the health and safety of the children in your care. Making sure that every staff person understands the appropriate procedures when transporting children ensures consistency. So always remember to look again, and please remind your families to do the same!

Take care,

Pam Stevens

Pam Stevens
Deputy Commissioner
for Child Care Services



**Child Care
SERVICES**

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For the thirteenth consecutive year, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is reminding families and caregivers of children about the danger of leaving children unattended in vehicles this summer. The goal of this year's "Look Again" campaign is to ensure that families, child care providers, and the public understand how to prevent pediatric vehicular heatstroke and remain vigilant when transporting children during Georgia's hottest months.

Vehicular heatstroke remains a persistent yet solvable danger in the United States. Since 1998, more than 1,000 children have died after being left in hot vehicles. In 2025, 31

child deaths were reported nationwide, highlighting why constant prevention efforts are necessary. In Georgia these tragedies continue to occur. During FY2025 ten children were left in vehicles by child care providers statewide. So far, in FY2026 eight children have been left in vehicles.

Officials remind the public to act responsibly and promptly if they see a child left alone in a vehicle by calling 911 immediately; emergency personnel are trained to respond. For more information, visit www.dec.state.ga.us or www.noheatstroke.org.



The Required Reporting Road Map: Essential Guidance for Providers



DECAL's Child Care Services (CCS) invites you to join us on May 12, 2026 from 12:00 - 1:00 PM for easy-to-follow practices and guidance for submitting a Required Report to the Department.

[Register Today!](#)

View other informative videos from Child Care Services Playlist on [DECAL's YouTube page](#).

Rules & Regulations Indicator Manuals Recently Updated!

The Rules and Regulations Indicator Manuals were created to ensure consistent application and enforcement of the rules, fair and unbiased delivery of services and to determine a program's compliance with the rules and regulations. It also assists child care program owners and staff in understanding and meeting the rules and regulations. Scan the QR code below for quick access to the Child Care Learning Center (CCLC) or Family Child Care Learning Home (FCCLH) Indicator Manual.

Scan below for the most recent versions!

CCLC Indicator Manual



FCCLH Indicator Manual



Clean Water for Georgia Kids™



Let's get the
lead
out of water!



Lead in drinking and cooking water is invisible but preventable!

Clean Water for Georgia Kids™ is a free program that offers lead testing for all drinking and cooking taps in licensed child care facilities and schools. In partnership with the Department of Early Care and Learning and GaDOE, the program provides sampling kits, testing results, and communication resources that help you throughout the process.

Growing Healthy Habits: Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE)

What is Farm to ECE?

Farm to Early Care and Education, or Farm to ECE, is an initiative that connects young children with fresh, locally grown foods in early care and learning settings; provides hands-on learning activities like gardening, farm visits and cooking activities; and integrates food-based learning into classrooms and kitchens.



The goal of Farm to ECE is to help young children develop healthy lifelong eating habits, while increasing access to healthy, nutritious meals. The initiative enhances the quality of early care and learning environments and encourages healthy choices for both children and families.

Farm to ECE Activities

Farm to ECE comes to life through simple, hands-on activities that help children explore food in meaningful ways such as gardening, hands-on cooking, taste tests, enjoying locally grown foods in meals and snacks, meeting local farmers, and participating in standards-aligned nutrition and gardening lessons.



Activities can be as simple as a taste test during snack time or spending 10 minutes reading a gardening, cooking, or farm-themed book. Together, these experiences help young learners understand where their food comes from and builds curiosity about healthy foods.

Get Ready to Garden

Are you interested in starting a garden, or do you already have an established garden? Now that spring is here, it's the perfect time to begin new garden activities or refresh existing ones. Longer days and warmer weather create ideal conditions for planting, observing growth, and engaging children in hands-on learning outdoors. Whether you're planting your first seeds in a container or re-introducing children to a garden they already love, this season offers endless opportunities to explore where food comes from and bring Farm to ECE learning to life.



As you plan your garden, consider starting with warm-weather crops, which can be planted after the last frost, typically in mid-April. Warm-weather crops include:

- Bell peppers
- Cucumbers
- Tomatoes
- Okra
- Cantaloupe
- Watermelon

Garden Safety

When gardening with young children, it's important to remember that while plants offer wonderful hands-on learning opportunities, some plants can be harmful when touched or eaten. Child care programs should take steps to eliminate any poisonous plants, dispose of any cuttings or trimmings safely, and provide close supervision whenever children are present in the garden area. Gardens often contain mildly toxic plants, such as tomatoes or potatoes, whose leaves can be hazardous if ingested. Because of this, the garden area should be used only for structured, supervised learning activities that support educational goals, rather than for free play or unstructured exploration. To learn more, refer to page 247 for [CCLC](#) and page 216 for [FCCLH](#) in the CCS Rules & Regulations Indicator Manuals.

Helpful Gardening Resources

- [UGA Vegetable Planting Chart](#)
- [Eat, Learn, Grow Georgia's Gardening Resource Library](#)
- [Getting Started: Georgia Farm to Early Care and Education Guide](#)
- [UGA Poisonous Plants in the Landscape Guide](#)

Visit DECAL's Nutrition Webpage

Outdoor Play: A Marvelous Mess

This information is from [Sesame Workshop](#)

Do you remember your favorite ways to play outside when you were growing up? Perhaps it was making mudpies or drawing in sand with a stick—or perhaps you preferred to avoid a mess.

Trying out new hands-on, physical ways of experiencing and connecting with nature, such as splashing in puddles, digging in dirt, or rolling down hills, can be deeply joyful learning experiences that build children's sense of connection to — and lifelong love of — nature. It can also mean getting dirty!



Just as babies explore the world with their mouths, young children learn so much through their sense of touch; many children are naturally drawn to digging and playing in dirt and splashing in water. These activities are great for stimulating children's senses and developing language skills (for instance, as they make mudpies, they may learn descriptive words such as squishy, mucky, slippery, slimy, or gloopy). They're also full of science lessons. For instance, when children garden with you, they may learn that water and dirt make mud, or that worms mix the soil as they move around, which helps plants grow.

The freedom and sensory experience of messy outdoor play can offer children confidence and the opportunity to build creativity in a way that indoor play can't. Messy play is also a great way for children to connect with one another. It's okay to get messy sometimes... consider planning for a "Messy Play Day" by asking parents to dress children in clothes that can get dirty or stained. Try letting go and joining them yourself!

And... check out the video below of Abby and Oscar learning and enjoying as they get messy after a rainstorm.



**Consumer Product Safety Commission Children's
Products Recalls**



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