



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



EXEMPTIONS NEWS YOU CAN USE WINTER 2025 Newsletter

Dear Providers,

Happy "Thriving" 2025! The Exemptions Unit is thrilled to welcome you into this vibrant new year! DECAL hopes you enjoyed a safe, warm, and wonderful holiday season, and we stand at the threshold of new beginnings, let's embrace this exciting opportunity to redefine our paths! This year is brimming with potential for fresh starts, new chances, and inspiring narratives as programs can explore new chapters in the lives of the children and families that are served. Together, DECAL can create extraordinary experiences that shape children's futures and foster growth in early childhood education throughout Georgia! Let's make this year a remarkable journey of preparation, collaboration, and shared success!

As always, DECAL remains committed to keeping all Providers informed about the significant changes that have been implemented. To that end, DECAL would like to highlight the new updates regarding Exempt Programs, ensuring that all relevant parties are aware of the modifications designed to enhance our services and support. These changes are part of our ongoing efforts to strengthen collaboration with programs and foster healthy and safe environments that benefits families and children throughout Georgia.

As a reminder, effective October 1, 2024, exemption rules have been updated. An online self-assessment should be completed by programs to determine the exemption status. Based on the assessment, some programs will be directed to continue the application process through DECAL KOALA accounts.

The self-assessment is available by using this link [DECAL](#) or the link below for your convenience. The self-assessment will need to be

completed for each type of program that will be operated.



Take care, stay warm and continue to have an amazingly safe and great school year!



On February 3, 2025, categories that are not required to apply for an exemption and maintain a DECAL KOALA account, **will be closed**. The accounts that will remain open are programs that hold an exemption category *1-Government Owned and Operated*, category *5-Faith-based Accredited or Religious Schools*, and category *7-Day Camp programs and school break*. Programs are encouraged to continue to complete the self-assessment to determine exemption or licensing requirements.

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CONTACT US

For additional information or questions,
please email ExemptionRuleChanges@dec.al.ga.gov.
Please feel free to contact our department if there are additional questions
at CCSExemptions@dec.al.ga.gov.

SAMPLE DOCUMENTS FOR LICENSE EXEMPT PROVIDERS



Preparation is indeed the cornerstone of success, especially in the realm of early childhood education! DECAL understands that having the appropriate resources can make all the difference in a program's effectiveness.

DECAL has sample documents designed to empower programs to foster child development. These invaluable resources are readily accessible on the DECAL website. (A link is provided below). Dive in and discover how these tools can enhance a program's educational journey to help create a nurturing environment for our young learners!

DOCUMENTS FOR LICENSE EXEMPT PROVIDERS
(listed in the Resources Tab)



DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED FOR CAPS HEALTH AND SAFETY MONITORING VISITS



Below is a list of documents that are required for submission during a Health and Safety Monitoring visit for exempt programs that hold a Category 1 and/or 7, that receive CAPS (Childcare and Parent Services).

PROGRAM DOCUMENTATION

- Required Approvals - Recent Fire Marshal inspection report (within last 12 months)

- Emergency Drill Documentation - Fire Drills-monthly, Tornado and other Emergency Situations Drills- every six months (*maintain documentation for 2 years*)
- Program Handbook - Parents are required to receive a copy of the following:
 - o Emergency preparedness and response plan
 - o Discipline policy
 - o The exclusion of children with contagious illnesses
 - o Notification of parents in the event their child becomes ill while at the facility
 - o The notification of all parents of enrolled children when a reportable contagious illness is present in the facility
 - o The prevention of and response to food and allergic reactions
 - o The handling and appropriate disposal of bodily fluids and storage of hazardous materials (soiled clothing and bedding)
 - o Recognition and reporting of child abuse and neglect
 - o Serious injuries/incidents reported or other required reporting circumstances
- Sign in & out sheets for current and previous 2 weeks.
- Field trip permission forms and passenger checklists (if applicable)
- Medication forms (if applicable) – Authorization and dispensing documentation
- Swimming Documentation (if in water 2 feet or more) - Environmental Health Approval, Lifeguard Certification(s), parental authorizations & documented 15-yard swim tests or other certifications
- Transportation Documentation (if applicable) to include:
 - o Written permission to transport children
 - o Vehicle Emergency Medical Forms
 - o Procedures for ensuring safety
 - o Annual vehicle inspection
 - o Passenger Checklists - 2 weeks
 - o Field trips documentation (if applicable) - permission forms, passenger checklists



CHILDREN'S DOCUMENTATION

Children's files

Enrollment records to include all required information and immunization records for CAPS recipients only.

- o Signed Parent acknowledgement indicating that parents have been informed that the program is not licensed and not required to be licensed by DECAL.

STAFF MEMBER'S DOCUMENTATION



- **Staff roster**
- **Criminal Background Checks (CBC)** for all employees – including volunteers and students in training.

- o A CBC is required for a volunteer when the individual provides services at the center more than once per quarter. A person who volunteers no more than once per quarter and/or no more than four times in a 12-month period is not required to obtain a records check determination. The volunteer must be under the supervision of a staff with a comprehensive CBC.

- **Pediatric CPR/First Aid Certification**

- o All staff must successfully complete within first 90 days of employment

- **Health and Safety Training**

- o All staff hired within first 90 days of employment

- **Annual training 10 hours**

- o All staff employed by the program over one year

NEW FINGERPRINT VENDOR IDENTIGO BY IDEMIA (IDEMIA)



The GBI has changed the fingerprint vendor from FieldPrint, to Identigo by Idemia (Idemia). If you have anyone needing to be fingerprinted, please have them contact the new vendor. Please visit the Criminal

Records Check on the DECAL website or click below for further information.

[DECAL WEBSITE](#)

[FIND AN INDENTOGO LOCATION](#)



What are the new exemption rule categories that became effective October 1, 2024? An explanation of changes to the Exemption categories may be viewed at [New vs Old Exemption Categories Effective October 1, 2024](#).

Why do I need to complete the self-assessment?

The self-assessment should be completed to ensure the program is operating in which it was initially approved. It is encouraged that every exempt program completes the self-assessment. The self-assessment will be available on October 1, 2024.

Where do I access the exemption self-assessment?

The exemption self-assessment may be accessed through your [DECAL KOALA](#) account or at the [Exemptions webpage](#) on the [DECAL](#) website.

What documents are needed for the self-assessment?

There are no documents needed for the self-assessment. It is an online self-assessment with no submission of documents.

Will I receive an exemption certificate after I complete the self-assessment?

No, a certificate will not be issued for completing the self-assessment. A print screen option will be available for programs to print once they have finished the self-assessment.

What programs continue to submit exemption applications?

Exemption categories 1-Government Owned and Operated, 5-Licensed Faith Based, and 7-Camp and School Break programs will continue to submit applications via [DECAL KOALA](#). Please note that only categories 1

and 7 will submit applications that want to participate in Child and Parent Services (CAPS). An exemption application can be found by creating an account or logging into an existing account on [DECAL KOALA](#).

What happens if a facility operates more than one type of program?

The facility will need to complete a self-assessment for each type of program to determine self-assessment status. An example of this would be a private school that also operates a Pre-K program for more than four hours a day.

What happens to current exemption categories 1 and 7 that do not receive CAPS? Those exemptions will remain open unless the program decides to close. This allows for these programs to apply for CAPS if desired.

Will category 13: No Pay, be required to apply for an exemption or license? No Pay programs do not meet the DECAL definition for a child care program, therefore does not require a license or an exemption.

Can you further explain the parameters around category 4: Short Term care? Children of any age can attend a program for a maximum of four hours a day. This excludes before and after school programs, which may need to be licensed and should complete the self-assessment.

Does this affect licensing programs and where can additional information be found on applying for a license? The new exemption rules do not affect licensed programs. To find out more information about the licensing process, please visit this link: [Starting a Child Care Program](#).

As a reminder, it is the responsibility of the program to ensure compliance with all additional regulations set forth by the state, locality, municipalities, or other governing agencies. This includes notifying and obtaining approval from all related entities involved in child care operations within a building. The duty of notifying and obtaining appropriate approvals is on the operator of the said child care program. Questions? Please email ExemptionRuleChanges@dec.al.gov

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS - COPING WITH STRESS/ANXIETY

by Strong4Life, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta

Practicing Deep Breathing

for Kids and Teens

Unlike normal breathing, taking deep breaths encourages us to slow down and pay attention to our body as we inhale and exhale. This relaxation exercise can help improve our ability to focus and better handle our emotions by lowering our heart rate, allowing our muscles to relax, and calming our mind and body.

Deep Breathing

STRONG⁴LIFE



As kids grow older, they face new stressors and challenges. By helping your child develop healthy coping skills (tools to help them manage their feelings and reduce stress), you're helping them become more resilient (better able to handle life's ups and downs).

Why practice deep breathing?

Unlike normal breathing, taking deep breaths encourages you to slow down and pay attention to your body as you inhale and exhale. This relaxation exercise can help improve your ability to focus and better handle your emotions by lowering your heart rate, allowing your muscles to relax, and calming your mind and body.



It is difficult to learn something new when we are anxious, angry or distracted.

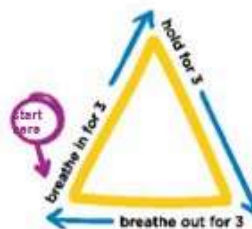
Teaching and practicing coping skills when everyone is calm gives us a variety of tools we can use to manage our feelings and reduce stress.

How to practice deep breathing

- 1 Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- 2 Place your hand on your stomach so that you can feel your hand moving up and down with each breath.
- 3 Inhale through your nose and feel your stomach fill with air.
- 4 Hold your breath for a few seconds.
- 5 Exhale slowly through your mouth.
- 6 Repeat several times or until you feel your body relaxing.

With deep breathing, you want to fill your stomach with air.

If you notice that only your chest or shoulders are rising and falling, try to breathe even deeper so your stomach fills with air.

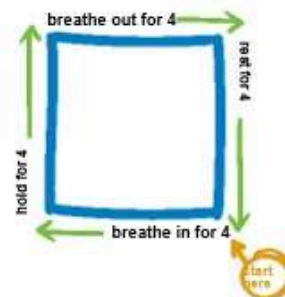


Triangle breathing

- Start at the bottom left of the triangle.
- Breathe in through your nose for 3 counts as you trace the first side.
- Hold your breath for 3 counts as you trace the second side.
- Breathe out of your mouth for 3 counts as you trace the final side.
- Repeat several times or until you feel your body relaxing.

Square breathing

- Start at the bottom right of the square.
- Breathe in through your nose for 4 counts as you trace the first side.
- Hold your breath for 4 counts as you trace the second side.
- Breathe out of your mouth for 4 counts as you trace the third side.
- Rest for 4 counts as you trace the final side.
- Repeat several times or until you feel your body relaxing.





FEBRUARY IS HEART HEALTH MONTH



Take Charge of Your Heart: Preventing Heart Disease in February

*written by Dr. Robert Spencer and Brooke O'Conner
Mondanock Community Hospital*

Take Control of Your Heart Health This February

Heart disease remains America's leading cause of death, but here's the empowering truth: according to the CDC, we can prevent nearly 80% of heart disease and stroke events. This Heart Health Month, discover how

small changes can make a profound difference in your cardiovascular wellness.

Understanding Your Heart Health

Your heart works tirelessly every moment of your life. By understanding and managing key risk factors like blood pressure, cholesterol, and lifestyle habits, you can significantly reduce your risk of heart disease. Let's explore the science-backed strategies that can protect your heart.

Essential Steps for a Healthy Heart

The “silent killer” – hypertension – often shows no symptoms while increasing your risk of heart attack and stroke. Regular monitoring and professional guidance are your first line of defense. Partner with your healthcare provider to develop an effective management plan.

When LDL (“bad”) cholesterol builds up in your arteries, it creates dangerous plaque deposits. The American Heart Association emphasizes the importance of:

- Regular cholesterol screening
- Understanding your numbers
- Following a heart-healthy diet
- Taking prescribed medications as directed

Transform your plate into a heart-protective powerhouse by incorporating:

- Colorful fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants
- Whole grains for sustained energy
- Lean proteins, especially fish high in omega-3s
- Healthy fats from sources like olive oil, avocados, and nuts
- Limited sodium and added sugars

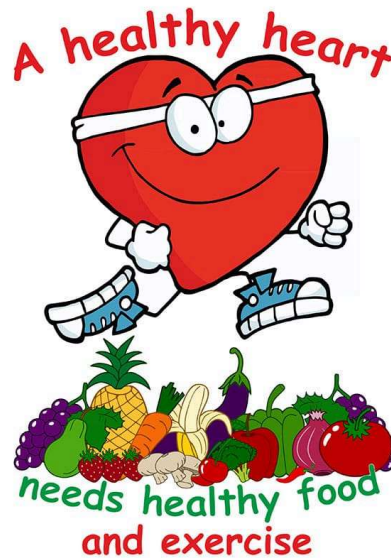
Consider following proven eating patterns like the Mediterranean or DASH diet, which have demonstrated significant cardiovascular benefits.

Your heart thrives on activity. The CDC recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise weekly – that's just 30 minutes, five days a week. Find activities you enjoy, whether it's:

- Brisk walking in nature
- Swimming laps
- Dancing to your favorite music
- Cycling with friends
- Gardening

Protect your heart by:

- Eliminating tobacco use
- Limiting alcohol consumption
- Managing stress through meditation or deep breathing
- Maintaining consistent, quality sleep
- Regular health check-ups



A WARM HEALTHY RECIPE



***Baked Spinach & Feta Pasta**

Enjoy this one-pan pasta with feta dish on its own as a vegetarian main or serve with sautéed chicken breast for a boost of protein. Feta softens in

the oven before it's combined with spinach and pasta, with the pasta cooking right in the baking dish.

Ingredients

- 1 (5-ounce) block feta cheese
- 8 cups lightly packed baby spinach (about 5 ounces)
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 large cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried dill
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper
- 8 ounces penne or rotini
- 2 cups boiling water

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Place feta in the center of a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Bake until softened and starting to brown, about 15 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, combine spinach, oil, garlic, dill, salt and pepper in a large bowl. Use your hands to massage the spinach until it's reduced in volume by half. Stir in pasta.
4. After the feta has baked for 15 minutes, add the spinach and pasta mixture to the baking dish. Pour boiling water over the mixture and gently stir. Cover with foil and bake until the pasta is tender, about 18 minutes. Remove from the oven and stir. Cover and let stand for at least 3 minutes before serving.

*By [Carolyn Casner](#)

Carolyn Casner is a longtime recipe tester and contributor for EatingWell. Over the years, she has tested and developed hundreds of recipes for the magazine and website.

EatingWell's Editorial Guidelines [50+ Healthy Dinner Recipes](#)

March is Developmental Disability Awareness Month

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (DDAM) is recognized during the entire month of March, that acknowledges individuals with developmental disabilities while promoting inclusion, understanding, and equity.

It was established through a Presidential Proclamation in 1987 and aims to increase awareness of the barriers people with developmental disabilities face, as well as highlight their achievements and potential.

DDAM is an opportunity to celebrate progress toward inclusivity and advocate for continued action in communities, workplaces, and schools.

The month kicks off on Saturday, March 1, and concludes on Monday, March 31.

What are some Developmental Disabilities?

Developmental disabilities are a diverse group of conditions that may affect physical, cognitive, or social development. These can include (but are not limited to):

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Intellectual Disabilities
- Learning Disabilities
- Cerebral Palsy
- Down Syndrome
- Epilepsy
- Language Disorders
- Sensory Disabilities (such as hearing loss and vision impairment)

How can we recognize Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month 2025 with children?

Teaching children about developmental disabilities during this month can foster empathy, understanding, and an appreciation for diversity. Here are some tips to help:

- Highlight role models: Introduce kids to influential figures with developmental disabilities, such as artist Judith Scott or self-advocate and public speaker Lydia X. Z. Brown.
- Engage in inclusive activities: Plan classroom or family activities that emphasize teamwork and inclusion, such as collaborative art projects or inclusive sports.
- Explore books and media: Read stories and watch films that include characters with developmental disabilities, helping kids understand diverse perspectives.
- Host a classroom discussion: Facilitate a conversation about respect, acceptance, and the ways we can make our communities more inclusive for everyone.
- Create an "Inclusion Board:" Have kids brainstorm ways to support inclusion and display their ideas prominently at school or home.

References: [Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month 2025](#) | [Twinkl USA](#)



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

At DECAL, we are deeply committed to enhancing the exemption application process for families and providers throughout Georgia. We recognize that your experiences and feedback are invaluable in helping us understand the challenges you face while navigating the online application. Your insights will guide us in making the process smoother and more accessible, reflecting our dedication to continuous improvement and community collaboration.

We encourage you to share your thoughts and experiences with us openly, as your voice is essential in fostering a supportive environment. Should you need assistance, please reach out to us via email at CCSExemptions@dec.al.ga.gov or call our voicemail at 770-293-5977. Together, we can streamline the application process and ultimately contribute to a brighter future for early childhood education in our community.



DECAL Social Media



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Social Media Checklist



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/user/GADECAL](https://www.youtube.com/user/GADECAL)

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Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning | 2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE East Tower
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