



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



# Child Care Services

## Winter 2026 Newsletter

Dear Child Care Provider,

As we start 2026, I want to remind you about a couple of Child Care Services initiatives. We are continuing our Chop, Look, and Listen choking prevention campaign. Over the next several months our licensing consultants will deliver our choking prevention materials to you during their visits. In the meantime, you can access the materials on our website.

Also, have you checked out the CCS Resource Suite? With over 85 resources available, the suite is designed to support your understanding of licensing requirements and related best practices. We want programs to succeed, and these tools are one way we partner with you to promote safe, high-quality environments that support children's daily needs. Resources are available in English and Spanish and span a wide variety of topics. See the "Helpful CCS QR Code!" section below to explore these resources and others that can support your program today.

Take care,

*Pam Stevens*

Pam Stevens  
Deputy Commissioner  
for Child Care Services



**Child Care  
SERVICES**

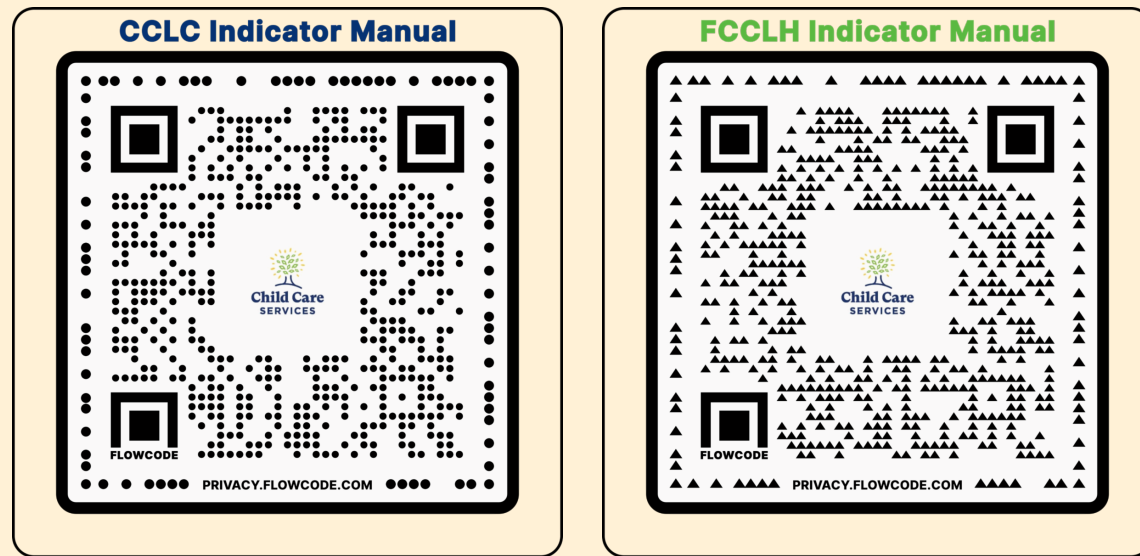
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## Helpful CCS QR Codes!

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.



The Child Care Services' Technical Assistance team provides downloadable practical resources to increase program understanding of licensing rules and regulations and their associated best practices. Explore the **CCS Resource Suite** by scanning the QR code below and check back often. We continue to add new resources regularly.



## Meals and Snacks Guidelines

The [Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\) Independent Childcare Centers Handbook](#) reminds all child care programs that all food components (menu items) of the meal or snack must be served to each child all at the same time.

- All components must be served at the same time, either on the table (family style) or given to each participant at the beginning of

the meal (pre-plated) and be provided in their minimum required serving size.

- Food or milk cannot be withheld until the end of the meal or until a particular item is finished.
- All participants should be encouraged to try all components of the meal and/or snack, but they cannot be forced to eat or finish any component or item.



#### Additional CACFP Meal Service Best Practices:

- Drinking water must be made available to children throughout the day, including at meal times. While water must be made available to children during meal times, it is not part of the reimbursable meal and cannot be served in lieu of fluid milk.
- Medical Statements – In order to claim a meal that does not conform to the regulatory meal pattern, there must be a medical reason or a special dietary need and a signed statement on file.
- Special Dietary Needs – If an institution is serving a child with special dietary needs (e.g., vegetarian), the parent/guardian may request substitutions by submitting a medical statement signed by a recognized medical authority, such as physician, physician assistant, nurse practitioner or registered dietitian, listing the foods to be omitted and appropriate substitutions.
- Meals may be served in a family style setting where foods are placed on the table in serving dishes and children serve themselves from the main dish, with assistance from the supervising adult, as necessary. Unlike preset service methods, family style meal service can increase children's acceptance of offered foods and their willingness to try new foods. Find more info [here](#).

Visit DECAL's Nutrition Webpage



Clean Water for Georgia Kids™



Let's get the  
**lead**  
out of water!



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INTERNATIONAL



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.

Get started today: [bit.ly/CWGK-home](http://bit.ly/CWGK-home) or call 1-855-997-3183.

## Winter Moves: Warm Hearts and Active Play for Healthy Growth

*This information is from DECAL's Nutrition Services Collaboration  
Nutrition Education and Physical Activity Team.*

With winter's arrival and dropping temperatures, we often stay indoors to keep warm. Educators, staff, and parents often face challenges in maintaining active routines during colder months. Physical activity is crucial year-round for boosting cardiovascular health, strengthening muscles and bones, and



improving mental well-being in both children and adults. Staying active, especially on gray, cold days, is essential.

Here are fun and engaging ideas for families and educators to incorporate physical activity into daily routines. Watch and monitor the temperature and wind chill, and limit outdoor time to 20–30 minutes when it's extremely cold (view [Weather Watch Chart](#)).



### Indoor Winter Activities:

- **[Color Painting](#)** (Classroom Art Station): Ignite creativity and sensory skills with color painting, where children can express their artistic side while learning about different colors. This activity is a fantastic way to explore their artistic expression and understand color, using large pieces of paper as their canvas.
- **[Toddler Snowstorm](#)** (Motor Skills Development): This activity from [SHAPE America](#) is a fun and engaging way for toddlers to develop social, emotional, and motor skills. It involves rolling and catching cotton balls, followed by creating a "snowstorm" by tossing the cotton balls into the air. This activity helps toddlers improve coordination and interaction with others.
- **[Winter-Themed Crafts](#)** (Fine Motor Enrichment): Enhance fine motor skills with winter-themed crafts. Crafting activities such as cutting, gluing and assembling various materials not only aid in developing hand-eye coordination, but also foster creativity, allowing children to create their own winter wonderlands.
- **[Story Time](#)** (Literacy and Seasonal Awareness): Read aloud **[‘Winter is Here,’ by Kevin Henkes](#)**. A celebration of the sights, sounds, and smells of the season, this is perfect for young readers. Snow falls, animals burrow, and children prepare for the wonders winter brings.
- **[Tummy Time](#)** (Infant Physical Development): An exercise for infants to 12 months, tummy time is an activity that needs supervised time when an infant is awake and alert, lying on her/his belly. Opportunities for tummy time should last as long as possible to help infants learn to enjoy it and build their strength. For infants who are not used to tummy time or do not enjoy it, each period of tummy time can start at 1–2 minutes and build up to 5–10 minutes over time.
- **[Simon Says](#)** (Group Movement Game): This is a fun classic game that encourages active play and helps in exercising listening skills. Although Simon Says is traditionally a child's game, kids of all ages can play and enjoy the game. The fun increases with the number of players!

- **[Let's Get Moving](#)** (Music and Movement Integration): Play "[Move Along with Elmo](#)" and enjoy the moves together. Sing Along: Substitute "Elmo" with the kids' names. For example, if the child's name is LaToya, you can sing "LaToya's got the moves!" Have fun dancing and singing along!

### Outdoor Winter Activities:

- **[Winter Nature Walks](#)** (Outdoor Exploration): Encourage the children to observe and describe what they see, hear, and feel. Bring along a small bag to collect interesting natural items like pinecones, acorns, or smooth stones. After the walk, you can discuss their findings and even create a nature collage with the items collected.
- **[Sensory Bin Winter Scavenger Hunt](#)** (Sensory Engagement): Create a winter-theme scavenger hunt list with items found on the playground like evergreen trees, stones, falling leaves, etc. Encourage children to use their five senses to experience the cold winter environment.
- **Snowball Toss** (Gross Motor Coordination): Create 'snowballs' using soft balls, or lightweight materials like yarn. Set up targets, such as buckets or hula hoops, and let children practice tossing the item into the target, enhancing both coordination and motor skills.
- **Soft Balls Bowling** (Indoor Physical Play): Set up bowling pins using empty plastic bottles. Children can take turns rolling soft balls and knocking down the "pins." This game is perfect for promoting physical activity, coordination, and friendly competition among young children.

### Physical Activity Resources

- Active Play in Cold Weather ([English](#) & [Spanish](#))
- [Dressing Kids for the Winter](#)
- [Understand the Weather: Child Care Weather Watch](#)
- [Cold Weather Safety](#)

When playing outside in cold weather, children should dress in layers to stay warm. Families are encouraged to provide hats and gloves, especially when temperatures drop below 32°F. As educators, we embrace the joys of the winter season and the adventures it brings! Always prioritize children's safety during physical activity, and let's keep moving together. The Nutrition Education and Physical Activity Team welcome you to share how your program keeps children active and engaged during the winter season!

Share your #ColdWinterActivities, #OutdoorIndoor stories and pictures with Physical Activity Specialist, Tina McLaren, MPH at [tina.mclaren@decal.ga.gov](mailto:tina.mclaren@decal.ga.gov)!

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## New Thriving Child Care Business Academy Study Groups

## Learn About Potential Tax Savings and Revenue Opportunities

Running a child care program takes heart, determination, and money. Those dollars matter more than ever. That is why the [DECAL Thriving Child Care Business Academy](#) is offering two new and helpful small study groups. Both are hosted by [Civitas Strategies](#).

The **Maximizing Tax Credits** Small Study Group will help owners and administrators work with their tax advisors to identify Georgia and federal credits that can potentially reduce costs and strengthen their child care businesses. This training is not tax advice from DECAL or Civitas. But it will help participants determine which credits could apply to them and understand the required documentation.

In the **Revenue Stacking in Georgia Small Study Group**, child care owners and administrators will explore ways to build stronger, more sustainable business models by combining Quality Rated payments, CAPS subsidies, Georgia's Pre-K enrollment, and other state supports to increase revenue and stabilize their businesses through consistent enrollment, and reduced reliance on a single funding stream. Providers who are either new to these programs or already enrolled, will learn strategies to strengthen their finances and plan for long-term success.

Like all small study groups, these sessions are free, virtual, and come with state-approved training hours and a \$125 stipend upon completion.

[Click Here for More Information](#)

[Register Now](#)

## 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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