



Reporting Injuries

Injury reporting is an important way to improve individual child care programs as well as make changes in child care on a larger scale. However, reporting is often overlooked and neglected. A clear plan for reporting and an understanding of why it is important makes this task easier for everyone.

What kinds of injuries happen in child care?

No matter how careful you are in planning your environment and supervising children's activities, some injuries are bound to happen. The most common injuries that occur in child care are:

- minor injuries such as cuts, scrapes, bruises and finger pinches from incidents such as bites or falls;
- severe injuries such as head injuries, broken bones, internal injuries, dislocations or dental injuries;
- poisoning;
- drowning;
- burns; and
- choking and suffocation.

Falls are the leading cause of serious injuries, with most injuries taking place on the playground.

What is injury reporting?

Injury reporting means keeping track of the injuries that happen in your child care program. You should make three copies of the information you record: one is given to the child's parents, one is placed in the child's file, and one is kept in a chronological injury log. You will need one additional copy to send to your state licensing agency if required. In the case of suspected child abuse, you will need to report to your local Child Protective Services agency as well.

Every child care facility should have an injury reporting form. Copies are available from

<https://cchp.ucsf.edu/content/forms>. The form should include room for basic information about the child, a description of the incident and the injury, and the care provided or measures taken. It should always be signed by a staff member.

What kinds of injuries do I report?

Within your own child care program, you should record any injury that requires first aid, such as a bandage or a cold compress.

State licensing agency requirements for reporting injuries are different in each state, so you will need to contact your own state licensing agency to find out what yours are. In general, you will need to report injuries that require medical treatment beyond first aid.

How will parents and state licensing respond to my injury reports?

Some child care providers worry that by reporting injuries, and especially by keeping track of them on forms, they will get into trouble. They are afraid that by giving parents a form describing the injury, they will bring too much attention to what was just a small incident. They may also worry that by reporting injuries to their state licensing agency, they will look careless or negligent.

In reality, both parents and state licensing know what all child care providers know—that children are active and no amount of childproofing and supervision can prevent injuries entirely. Planning for injuries shows that you are responsible, and reporting them is a good tool for communication with parents and families. Reporting injuries should be part of your overall plan to keep children safe while they are in your care, along with measures like covering unused electric outlets, keeping sharp objects out of reach, and having appropriate fall surfacing under playground structures.

How will reporting injuries help my child care program or others?

By recording the injuries that happen in your program, you can look for patterns caused by hazardous conditions and spot problem areas before they cause serious injury. For example, if a tree root has cracked and raised the cement in your playground, children may trip over the crack every few days, causing a series of scraped knees and elbows. If you track these injuries with a reporting form, you will notice that they keep happening in the same area, and can investigate and repair the problem before a more serious injury happens.

In this same way, reporting injuries to your state licensing agency helps all child care programs to be safer. When statistics on injuries are compiled by a central source, health care researchers can see trends in injuries. Researchers may notice that a certain kind of playground equipment causes more injuries than others, and can alert all child care programs. If no one reports injuries, then the same kinds of accidents will continue to occur in all programs, because no one is sharing information. Sometimes even one reported injury, if it is very severe or could have been very severe, can be enough to start a recall.

Through injury reporting, you may also notice if a particular child is having repeated injuries. This may be a cue that the child has a problem such as improper foot positioning, balance difficulties, or vision issues which should be investigated by a physician.

Should I report staff injuries?

Reporting injuries that happen to staff members is just as important as reporting those that happen to children. You and your staff deserve a safe and healthy work environment, and reporting your own injuries will help you correct problems sooner. In addition, Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) requires occupational health exams for injuries and claims. The most common injury to child care workers is back injury, usually caused by lifting children, uncomfortable work surface heights, and other correctable causes. If a staff member hurts her back while changing diapers, perhaps the height of the changing table should be considered. If a staff member's back hurts because he has been sitting on

the floor reading to children without a back support, a chair could solve the problem. If you don't record injuries when they happen, some of these problems may go unnoticed and unresolved.

What about injuries that happen outside of my care?

In general, you do not need to report injuries to children if they don't happen while they are under your care. The exception is when you suspect that a child in your care is being physically or sexually abused or neglected. In that case, you are required by law to immediately report your suspicion to the local child protective services agency, no matter where the abuse occurred.

If you notice that a child already has an injury upon arrival at child care, ask the parents what happened and document the injury in your injury log. This will protect you, and help you track if the child is having repeated injuries outside of your care, which may indicate medical problems, neglect or abuse.

How can I talk to parents about injury reporting?

Talk to parents about injury reporting when they first enroll their child in your program. As you are asking them to fill out forms about their child's medical history and their emergency contact information, show them the injury reporting forms and let them know you will document any injuries, no matter how minor. Explain that this helps you continue to improve your child care program and catch potential problems early. Parents will be reassured that you are prepared, and won't be surprised to see an injury report if their child does get hurt.

Resources

Call your licensing agency for your state's specific reporting requirements.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Injury Prevention and Control at <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/index.html>

National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education at <https://nrckids.org/>

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