



Child Care Centers

General Requirements to Help Prepare for State Fire Marshal Inspection

The Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) conducts fire inspections in all child care centers that are applying for new licenses and those that are already licensed by the Department of Early Learning (DEL). DEL is the state licensing authority for child care centers, per the [Washington Administrative Code 170-295](#). DEL requires approval from the OSFM before licensing a facility and may suspend a current license if the OSFM identifies hazards. Child care centers are inspected to the International Fire Code, all applicable state amendments, and to the [Washington Administrative Code 212-12](#). The OSFM does not conduct inspections on home child care facilities.

This document provides the general requirements for compliance, but it does not include every requirement. Local building and fire codes still apply, which means the local permit and plan review processes shall be followed and approval from the local authorities obtained.

Where there is a conflict between a general requirement and a specific requirement, the specific requirement or most restrictive provision applies.

Occupancy Classification for Child Care Centers

Child care centers are generally classified as Group E occupancies, but the age of children being cared for may require the center to be classified as a Group I-4. Building construction requirements and fire protection features are more restrictive for Group I occupancies. The local building and/or fire official will determine the occupancy classification as defined below:

Group E occupancy – Any portion of a building/room or structure used for child care services for more than five children **older** than 2-½ years of age.

Group I-4 occupancy – Any portion of a building/room or structure used for child care services for more than five children **younger** than 2-½ years of age. Rooms located on the level of exit discharge and have exits doors directly from the exterior of the building may be classified as a Group E.

Certificate of Occupancy

- Obtain a Certificate of Occupancy from the local building department. IBC111.1

The following items must be listed on the Certificate of Occupancy:

- Occupancy Classification (E or I-4 as indicated above). IBC111.2
- Address of the location being licensed. IBC 111.2
- If the building has multiple uses, the space being license shall be clearly identified. IBC 111.2

Building Features

- Address must be visible from the street. IFC505.1
- The perimeter of the building is free of fire hazards. IFC304.1



- If the building houses multiple occupancy uses, the required fire separation is provided:
 - 2-hour fire separation in a non-sprinklered building
 - 1-hour fire separation in a sprinklered building
- If caring for more than five, and less than one hundred, 2-½ year olds and younger children and you want to maintain an “E” classification, then each room that is used for the care of children shall have an exit door directly to the exterior of the building.

Exit Signs

- Exit signs are clearly visible from any direction of approach. IFC 1011.1
- Exit signs are installed over exit door. IFC 1011.1
- Exit signs are illuminated. IFC 1011.3, 1011.5, 1011.6.2 & 3
- Exit signs have contrasting color/design to the background where they are installed. IFC 1011.6.1
- Exit signs shall be installed and maintained. IFC 1030.4

Egress Illumination

- Means of egress travel routes are illuminated at all times. 1006.1
- Emergency egress lighting units have emergency backup power source. 1006.3
- Monthly documented 30 second test of back up battery in emergency light(s). IFC 604.5.1
- Annual documented 90 minute test of back up battery in emergency light(s). IFC 604.5.2

Means of Egress

Doors

- Doors readily open from egress side without use of a special key, special knowledge, or effort. IFC 1008.1.9
- Door hardware to include handles, pulls, latches, locks, and other operating devices do not require tight grasping, tight pinching, or twisting of the wrist to operate. IFC 1008.9.1
- The unlatching of any door or leaf does not require more than one operation (single action hardware). IFC 1008.1.9.5
- Manually operated flush bolts or surface bolts are not permitted. IFC 1008.1.9.4
- Panic hardware is installed on exit doors where the occupant load is 50 or more. IFC 1008.1.10
- A second exit is required from spaces that care for 10 or more children 2 ½ years of age or less. IFC 1015.6
- Exit doorways are clear of obstructions. IFC 1015.2
- Egress doors are of the pivoted or side-hinged swinging type. IFC 1008.1.2
- Doors of a facility where the occupant load is 50 or more must swing in the direction of egress travel. IFC 1008.1.2
- All egress doors must have a width of 32 inches or greater. IFC 1008.1.1
- Means of egress doors shall be readily distinguishable. IFC 1008.1
- Door hardware height shall be between 34 inches to 48 inches above finished floor. IFC 1008.1.9.2
- Combustible materials shall not be stored in exits. IFC 315.3.2



Exit Travel

- Egress from a room or space does not pass through adjoining/intervening rooms or areas. IFC 1014.2
- Egress routes do not pass through any room that can be locked to prevent egress. IFC 1014.2
- Egress shall not pass through kitchens, storage rooms, closets, or spaces used for similar purposes. IFC 1014.2
- Corridors used as egress routes must have the following minimum unobstructed widths: IFC 1018.2
 - 36 inches in buildings with an occupant load of 50 or fewer
 - 44 inches in buildings with an occupant load greater than 50
- Exit paths lead to a public way (e.g., sidewalk, parking lot). IFC 1020.2.2, 1027.5
- The required width of corridors shall be unobstructed. IFC 1018.3

Sprinkler System

- Installed when occupant load is more than 50. IFC 903.2.3
- If installed, shall be monitored through the fire alarm system. IFC 903.4.1
- Annual inspection and testing is required. IFC 901.6
- Annual confidence test report readily available for review by inspectors. IFC 901.6.2
- Daycares on 2nd floor and above are sprinklered. IBC TABLE 503/504

Fire Alarm System

- Installed when occupant load is 50 and greater. IFC 907.2.3
- If installed, monitoring is provided. IFC 907.6.5
- Annual inspection and testing is required. IFC 901.6, 907.8
- Annual confidence test report readily available for review by inspectors. IFC 901.6.2, IFC 907.8.1
- Fire alarm system has occupant notification (voice/alarm) when occupant load exceeds 100. IFC 907.5 SSBC

Portable Fire Extinguisher

- Minimum size is (2)A:10B:C. IFC 906.3
- Travel distance from any point in facility to an extinguisher is not more than 75 feet. IFC 906.3(1) TABLE
- Travel distance to fire extinguishers for cooking areas is not to exceed 30 feet. IFC 906.1
- One fire extinguisher is installed for every 3,000 square feet. IFC 906.3(1) TABLE
- Extinguishers are located in a conspicuous location. IFC 906.5
- Extinguishers shall not be obstructed or obscured. IFC 906.6
- Extinguishers shall be installed in a cabinet or by a hanging bracket. IFC 906.7 & 8
- The tops of extinguishers shall not exceed 5 feet above the floor. IFC 906.9.1
- Monthly checks shall be completed/documentated by facility staff to ensure extinguishers are ready for use (needles should be in green on gauges, safety pins are in place, seals are not broken, and hoses are clear of debris). IFC 906.2 (NFPA 10)
- Annual inspection and testing required. IFC 901.6



Fire Safety

- Monthly fire drills are conducted. IFC 405.2
- Monthly fire drills are documented. IFC 405.5
- If the facility has an automatic fire alarm system, the system shall be activated as part of the drill. IFC 405.7
- Fire escape routes shall be posted at exit discharge. IFC 404.5.
- Fire safety plan in place per State Amended Chapter 4 of the current International Fire Code. IFC 404.3.2
- Fire evacuation plan in place per State Amended Chapter 4 of the current International Fire Code. IFC 404.3.1
- Fire safety plan is reviewed annually and documented. IFC 404.4

Occupant Load

- The licensed capacity is determined by the Department of Early Learning. WAC 170-295.
- The fire and life safety inspection for occupant load (not licensed capacity) shall be determined by taking the net floor area and dividing it by 35.
 - Net Floor Area is defined as – the actual occupied area (only the room areas that are used for specific occupancy purposes) not including unoccupied accessory areas such as corridors, stairways, toilet rooms, mechanical rooms, or closets. IFC TABLE 1004.1.2

General Housekeeping

- Non-sprinklered building maximum storage height is 24 inches below the ceiling. IFC 315.3.1
- Sprinklered building maximum storage height is 18 inches below sprinkler heads. IFC 315.3.1
- No storage in electrical, mechanical or boiler rooms. IFC 315.3.3
- Extension cords are not to be used in place of permanent wiring. IFC 605.5
- Penetrations to smoke/fire barriers shall be sealed with a rated material. IFC 703.1
- Artwork shall not exceed 20 percent coverage of the corridor sidewall. IFC 807.4.3.2
- Approved multi plug adapters are used. IFC 605.4
- Classroom decorative materials shall not exceed 10 percent of walls. IFC 807.1.2
- Carbon monoxide detectors installed in I-4 occupancies. IFC 908.7, 908.7.1