



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness

Preparing for Tornado Season



Tornadoes can happen at any time. However, they are most likely to occur in the spring and summer months. Tornadoes may cause extensive damage to structures and disrupt transportation, power, water, gas, and communications in its direct path and in neighboring areas. With spring fast approaching, now is a good time to be sure that your program is prepared.

Know Your Risk

Tornadoes have been reported in every state, but [occur most often](#) in Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas. While tornadoes can occur during any month of the year, most tornadoes are reported in June.

Develop a Plan

All Head Start and Early Head Start programs are required to have [emergency preparedness and response plans](#) for natural disasters and other extreme events in or near programs (45 CFR § 1302.47(b)(8)).

Each state is also required to have a child care disaster plan, which includes requirements for programs' emergency plans. While states' minimum requirements may be different, all emergency preparedness plans should include regularly scheduled practice drills in the center or family child care home. Drills should include members of the community who may be needed during an emergency, such as first responders, child care health consultants, and emergency management officials. See your state's licensing regulations to review the frequency at which your program is required to conduct drills.



“The only way to prepare for disasters is to consider various worst case or unique scenarios, and to develop contingency plans.”

Caring for Our Children, 3rd Edition

Practice Your Plan

The recommended response to a tornado is to shelter-in-place. Seek shelter in an interior, protected area of the building on the lowest level possible or in a designated tornado shelter. When sheltering-in-place, make sure to:

- Keep children away from windows
- Take attendance
- Bring disaster supplies to the designated safe location

Review a sample checklist to help your program practice your tornado drill. If you work in a center, make sure all staff knows their unique role in tornado response. Staff assignments are a necessary part in making your disaster preparedness and emergency response plan. Use this resource to help assign staff roles and responsibilities to fit the needs of your program.

Know the Warning Signs

Learn the Lingo:

- **Tornado Watch:** Risk of tornado has increased greatly, but timing and location are still uncertain. Watches are intended to set your emergency response plans into motion.
- **Tornado Warning:** Tornado is occurring soon or has a very high chance of occurring. Set your emergency response plan into motion as quickly as possible.

Several states require programs to include tornadoes in their emergency plans. For example, in the following states, child care licensing regulations require:

- [Iowa](#): Monthly tornado drills and annual staff training
- [Missouri](#): Tornado plans to be posted in programs and shelter-in-place drills to be practiced at least every three months
- [Oklahoma](#): Tornado plans, shelter-in-place plans, and monthly shelter-in-place drills

See Standard [9.2.4.3: Disaster Planning, Training, and Communication](#) in *Caring for Our Children, 3rd Edition* (CFOC), to find out what your plan should include.





Look for the Danger Signs of a Potential Tornado:

- A dark, greenish sky
- Large, dark, low-lying clouds
- Large hail
- A loud roar, like a freight train

Learn more about how to prepare your program for tornadoes at usa.childcareaware.org/tornadoes.

Check Your Emergency Kit

Consider the following when preparing your emergency preparedness kit:

- Child information sheets are up to date with current phone numbers and contacts
- Medication needed by children and staff is included in your kit
- Kit is stored according to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidelines, in the basement or wherever the tornado shelter is located
- Toys and other items to keep children entertained and relieve tension are used and work



After you've practiced your tornado drill, it's important to go back and double-check your emergency supplies to ensure they meet the needs of the children in your program. To learn what else your kit should contain, review CFOC Standard [5.6.0.1: First Aid and Emergency Supplies](#).

Some things to consider when making your kit:

Family Resources

Help families in your program prepare for tornado season. Share the [Family Preparedness: Thinking Ahead](#) handout from the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

Kid's Corner

Struggling to talk to children about tornado season? Check out the [Ready Wrigley](#) activity book series from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The books are available in both English and Spanish.



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