



Child Foster Care Home Safety Checklist – Guidance

This document is to provide clarification regarding items on the home safety checklist. It can be used by licensing agencies completing initial and ongoing assessment and placing agencies for the purpose of an emergency relative placement.

Applicants or license holders may also find these clarifications helpful in preparing for initial licensure and meeting ongoing home safety requirements. Generally, a variance should not be approved for items on the home safety checklist but may be considered on a case-by-case basis and after consultation with licensing triage.

Emergency Procedures

- 1. A list of emergency phone numbers** - it is recommended that applicants and license holders use the [DHS Foster Care Emergency Escape Plan](#) form. If not using that form, the emergency procedures document:
 - Must include 911 and local phone numbers for non-emergency police, fire departments, and poison control.
 - May also include phone numbers for the family’s local clinic or hospital, mental health crisis, family emergency contacts, placing worker contact information, and the placing county’s after-hours/emergency number.
 - Must be posted in a location known by everyone in the home and a copy kept in the family’s file.
- 2. A written fire/emergency escape plan** - it is recommended to use the [DHS Foster Care Emergency Escape Plan](#) form. If not using that form, the fire/emergency escape plan must document:
 - A meeting place outside to determine if anyone is missing
 - Where the family would meet during a storm or tornado
 - Where the family would take temporary shelter if needed
 - Locations of smoke detectors and fire extinguishers
 - An acknowledgment for child foster care from all applicants and license holders that for placement of a child at risk of starting fires, they will comply with locking and removing all fire-starting objects and discuss with the case manager the need for a supervision plan

The form must be clear and list specific addresses, if applicable (not “grandma’s house”). If areas on the form aren’t applicable, indicate this, rather than leave it blank. The plan must also include a floor plan clearly indicating the location of doors and windows and emergency evacuation routes with arrows. The plan must include all levels of the home, including unfinished basements. This must be posted in a location known by everyone in the home and a copy kept in the family’s file.

- 3. An operable flashlight and radio or television set that does not require electricity** – these items must be accessible in the home and be charged or have working batteries. A cell phone may be used as a flashlight if it remains charged at all times. Using a cell phone as a radio/TV source is not allowed as there may be problems with reception. Hand crank radios with flashlights are great resources to meet both these requirements and may also include charging capability.
- 4. Accessible First Aid Supplies** - at a minimum the following items must be accessible to everyone in the home: bandages, scissors, ice bag or cold pack, oral or surface thermometer, mild liquid soap, and adhesive tape. The CDC provides a [list of basic first aid supplies](#) recommended to be in every home.
- 5. An operable telephone** - there must be an accessible phone in the home for emergencies. This may be a cell phone, there is no requirement for a landline. Personal cell phones typically only used by the license holder may not be used as the phone for the household. The phone must be centrally located in the home and always charged and accessible for all members of the family, including foster children. Some families achieve this by purchasing an inexpensive prepaid cell phone, however, the phone must always have “minutes” available. Smart speakers, such as an Alexa or Echo, cannot be used for this purpose as they are dependent on a power source and Wi-Fi accessibility. Nonactive cell phones cannot be used for this purpose, even if they can call 911.

If the phone is a landline or one that relies on electricity, families need to have a plan for having an accessible phone in the event of an extended power outage. A cell phone is an appropriate back up plan.

Physical Environment

- 1. Exit doors and windows are not obstructed and easily opened from the inside** - rooms used for sleeping need at least two ways to exit. Generally, this is a door and one window large enough for egress (to exit). Nothing can be blocking windows or doors in sleeping rooms for foster children or exits identified on the emergency escape plan. Windows and doors must be able to open. If there is only one window in the bedroom, it cannot be blocked by an air conditioner. During each home safety inspection, the applicant or license holder can open the windows to ensure they open and close in a reasonable fashion. Cranks must be present on windows that require them. Licensors are not required to measure windows, however if they visibly look too small for egress, there is reasonable cause for a fire marshal inspection. It is generally not recommended to have plastic coverings on windows; however, they are approved by the fire marshal if they are transparent, only attached from the inside with two-sided tape, Velcro, or static cling, and have enough material overhanging on all sides to allow grabbing it from any direction for easy removal.
- 2. Wiring appears safe, no known hazards exist** – there must be no electrical hazards such as open wiring, missing switch plates, or holes where light fixtures would be. If there are questions, licensors can take pictures and consult with the fire marshal to determine if an inspection is needed.

3. Extension cords are appropriately used and are not used in place of permanent wiring -

Extension cords may be used for temporary purposes such as holiday lights. If there are questions, licensors can take pictures and consult with the fire marshal to determine if an inspection is needed.

4. A fire extinguisher is maintained in the home – The fire extinguisher must be a minimum rating of 2A:10BC. The number in front of “A” cannot be lower than “2” and the number in front of “BC” cannot be lower than “10”. National Fire Protection Association provides more information on [fire extinguisher ratings](#).

For applicants or license holders who live in an apartment, the fire extinguisher must be located inside the individual apartment. The extinguisher located in the apartment building hallway does not meet this requirement.

An annual inspection and retag is required by a professional certified contractor. A certified contractor may be difficult to locate. Searching online will identify private companies that service them mainly for businesses and large buildings. It is advised to call one of these companies or the local fire department to determine if they do annual inspections for residential-grade extinguishers. If unable to find a certified contractor, licensor holders will need to purchase a new fire extinguisher annually.

Documentation of monthly inspections is not a requirement; however, the below information provides guidance to license holders on what to look for during a monthly visual inspection:

- Extinguishers are in their designated place – this can be near but not in the kitchen, easily reachable, not stashed behind anything, and standing upright.
- The expiration date has not passed, and replacement or recharge/service is not needed–
 - Non-rechargeable extinguishers expire 12 years from the manufacture date stamped on the bottom of the device or sooner if inspection warrants it.
 - Rechargeable/serviceable extinguishers “expire” and must be serviced and recharged every six years or sooner if inspection warrants it.
- Pressure gauge readings are in the proper range or position
- Push-to-test pressure indicators on non-rechargeable extinguishers are tested, if applicable
- Safety seals are not broken or missing, and the pin is in the handle, if applicable
- There is no evidence of physical damage, corrosion, leakage, or clogged nozzle.
- Operating instructions are legible and face outward

5. All smoke detectors work and are properly installed on all levels of the home – all smoke detectors must be tested, even if they are hardwired together. At a minimum, there must be at least one smoke detector on each level of the home and in hallways outside sleeping rooms. Smoke detectors must be replaced every 10 years. Carbon monoxide detectors are not part of the home safety checklist requirement and not monitored by licensing but will be a requirement if a fire marshal inspection is completed.

6. Interior doors can be unlocked from the outside - all interior doors are checked for locks and the applicant or license holder can demonstrate or explain how they can unlock an interior door from the outside and how they will ensure keys or other hardware needed to unlock the door is always available

and accessible. An interior door that locks from the outside (for instance a closet or room not meant for children to access), must also be able to be unlocked from the inside. This is to avoid a child being intentionally or accidentally locked inside a room or closet. Under no circumstances can a padlock be used on a door to an interior room.

- 7. The home is clean and free from accumulations of dirt, garbage, peeling paint, vermin, and insects** - the home must also be free of animal feces and urine. A walk-through of all rooms of the home must be completed to assess any obvious hazards in addition to general cleanliness. It is assumed that foster children could have access to all areas of the home, even if the applicant or license holder indicates that the area will not be accessible to foster children. If a door is locked, a licenser must inquire as to what is kept behind the locked door and request to see inside the room to assess for any safety hazards.
- 8. The outside property is free from debris and safety hazards. Exterior stairs and walkways are free of ice and snow** - A walk-through around the property must be completed to determine any potential safety hazards. Outside egress windows cannot be filled with snow. Ensure if there are items stored on the property, they are not hazardous or dangerous.

If the home has a hot tub, wading or swimming pool discuss household rules around access and use of the pool and how adult supervision will always be provided. Confirm the applicant or license holder understands they will need to meet the individualized water safety supervision needs for each child placed in the home. Confirm the applicant or license holder does the appropriate maintenance needed to prevent infectious diseases. Document this on the home safety checklist.

- 9. Fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, and hot surfaces that could cause burns are protected by guards when in use** - discuss whether fireplaces are used and when or if there has been a change in the operation or use of an existing fireplace or wood-burning stove. Determine if a fire safety inspection is required according to the triggers in [Minnesota Rules, part 2960.3050](#). A gas or electric fireplace, radiator, or hot water baseboard may still need a guard to avoid exposure to a hot surface.
- 10. The heating system in the home is maintained and in good working condition** – licensers must observe furnaces or other heating systems for any obvious hazards and discuss with the applicant and license holder how it is checked and maintained. A furnace inspection is not required. If the heating system is not inside the unit or apartment, it does not need to be observed, as the building would have its own inspection process.

Home Safety and Health

- 1. Knives, tools, matches, and other potentially hazardous materials are not accessible** – check countertops, drawers, etc. for these items to ensure they are safely stored, considering the ages and behaviors of children that are being placed. Examples of potentially hazardous materials may include propane or lighters.

- 2. Chemicals, detergents, and other toxic substances are not stored with food products or accessible in any way that poses a risk to children** - when viewing cupboards, make sure toxic substances are not stored with food items. Also, ensure that toxic substances are not accessible based on the ages and behaviors of foster children. Examples of toxic substances include insecticides or pesticides, cleaning supplies, bleach, detergents, air fresheners, batteries, paint, etc.
- 3. Combustible items are properly stored at least 36 inches from any heating sources** - this may include a furnace or water heater. Combustible items are anything that could catch on fire. If there are permanent fixtures that are combustible within 36 inches of a heating source, a fire safety inspection or consultation with the fire marshal may be needed to address the concern. Permanent fixtures do not include the wall next to the heating source.

If a home has electric baseboard heating, the applicant must follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding the recommended space between the baseboard heater and combustible items. Per the Minnesota State Fire Marshal, hot water baseboards do not pose a hazard and do not have a space separation requirement.

- 4. Individual clean linens, towels, and washcloths are provided for each foster child** – there must be enough of these items in the home for each foster child. They do not need to be labeled or specific to the child.
- 5. Food is handled and properly stored to prevent contamination, spoilage, or a threat to health** – there cannot be food in cupboards, countertops, refrigerators, and freezers that is obviously contaminated or spoiled. There is no need to check every food item for expiration dates.
- 6. Medication is not accessible to children based on age and/or identified safety concerns** - discuss where medication is stored based on the ages and behaviors of foster children. This information must also be included in the license holder's [Foster Care Drug and Alcohol Policy](#).
- 7. Schedule II controlled substances are stored in a locked area** - discuss what these medications might be, what the plan is for locking them, and where the locked location will be. The US Drug Administration provides a [list of drug schedules](#). Foster children who are authorized to administer their own medication can have access to it as determined by their case plans. Their medication must still be inaccessible to other children in the home and if it is a Schedule II, it must still be locked. If there are not currently any Schedule II medications, discuss if this changes, the licensing agency must be notified, and the license holder must ensure proper storage. Applicants and license holders are not required to complete medication administration training but are required to document [training on medical equipment](#) used to sustain life or monitor a medical condition of an individual in care.

While recent Minnesota legislation has changed making recreational cannabis legal, it is still considered a controlled substance and therefore must be stored in a locked area. License holders are required to indicate chemical use and storage on their [Foster Care Drug and Alcohol Policy](#). [Minnesota Statutes 260C.215, subdivision 9](#) prohibits smoking of any type in the presence of children and in any vehicle used to transport a child or any enclosed space where a child could be exposed to secondhand

smoke. Cannabis use is not specifically addressed in licensing rules or laws. The most up-to-date information about cannabis can be found on the [Minnesota Office of Cannabis Management](#) website.

- 8. There is a safe water supply in the home** – city water is considered safe water. If the home uses well water, it must be tested by a certified laboratory to ensure proper levels of coliform and nitrates. The Minnesota Department of Health provides information on [well testing, results, and options](#). Further information is provided on [Accredited Labs in Minnesota Accepting Drinking Water Samples from Private Well Users](#). Agencies can approve the use of bottled water or a filtration system to be used as an alternative for cooking and drinking. A variance is not required for the use of bottled water or a filtration system, and annual well-testing is not required if the home continues to provide a safe water supply. This must be addressed each time a home safety checklist is completed.
- 9. Water temperature does not exceed 120 degrees** - check the temperature at the tap with a thermometer or view the temperature setting on the water heater. If over 120 degrees, it must be decreased. If the license holder or applicant does not have access to or control of the water heating source, discuss anti-scalding devices that can be used on taps, or a possible plan to address individual safety concerns.
- 10. Weapons and ammunition are stored separately in locked areas that are not accessible or visible to foster children** - Weapons must be unloaded, and cannot be visible, and workers must observe how weapons and ammunition will be locked and stored separately. A gun or trigger lock on its own is not enough. Other weapons or instruments designed for and capable of producing bodily harm, such as bb guns, bows and arrows, hunting knives, and swords also cannot be visible or accessible and must be locked. Bows and arrows do not have to be stored and locked separately, however, arrows could still be considered a weapon, so still need to be in a locked area and not accessible or visible.

If an applicant discloses they have a legal permit to carry a weapon, there needs to be a discussion that the requirements related to weapons pertain to the licensed home. No one, regardless of having a permit to carry, may have a gun on their person in a licensed home or in an unlicensed relative home with an emergency foster care placement. If an applicant or license holder plans to carry outside the licensed home, the placing worker must be made aware to determine whether this creates safety concerns related to the child in placement. If an applicant wishes to request a variance they may do so in accordance with [Minnesota Statutes, section 245A.04, subdivision 9](#). If an agency considers granting a variance to this home safety requirement the agency must be able to articulate how granting a variance does not affect the health or safety of persons receiving services, and that the applicant or license holder has a clear and achievable plan for preventing children’s access to the weapon. A variance to this item on the home safety checklist is not generally recommended.

If there are no weapons in the home, indicate this on the checklist. If this changes, the applicant or license holder must immediately contact the licensing agency and demonstrate how these items will be locked and stored as required.

Sleeping Space for Foster Children & Reduction of Risk of Sudden Unexpected Infant Death

- 1. Sleeping space for children has two exits** – If the sleeping space for foster children is in an area not normally used for sleeping, the applicant or license holder can request a variance to allow for this. An example of when this may be requested and approved is if the child will be sleeping in a living room due to the windows in the bedroom being too small to be considered as a second exit from the room. If a sleeping space in an apartment or mixed occupancy building does not have two exits, consult with the state or local fire marshal to determine if the building meets code. For example, if bedrooms in an apartment are internal and without windows, therefore only have one way to exit, it may still meet code if a sprinkler system has been installed. In this case, the licensing agency may grant a variance to the requirement of having two exits.

An infant is a child from birth through 12 months of age. If there is no plan to care for infants, indicate this, and the checklist is completed. If foster care will be provided to infants, the following items must be addressed on the home safety checklist:

- 2. A safe crib is available and used for each infant in care** - ensure that there is a safe crib in the home PRIOR to an infant being placed. If the crib is not set up during the initial licensing inspection, it must be set up and inspected prior to placement. Pack and plays are acceptable, bassinets are not. It is strongly recommended to check the [U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Website](#) for recalled or unsafe cribs.
- 3. Infants younger than one year must be placed on their back to sleep, in a crib, directly on a firm mattress** - An infant who independently rolls onto its stomach after being placed to sleep on its back may be allowed to remain sleeping on its stomach if the infant is at least six months of age. Approval to allow an infant less than six months to remain sleeping on its stomach requires consent by a parent or guardian thus requires consultation with the placing county's attorney on who has legal custody to give authority. If an infant falls asleep while being held or before being placed in a crib, the license holder must move the infant to the crib as soon as practicable. Placing a swaddled infant down to sleep is prohibited for any infant that has begun to roll over independently. Before any use of swaddling for sleep, the license holder must obtain informed written consent from the parent or guardian.
- 4. If an infant is not placed on their back to sleep, there must be documentation from the infant's physician** - The documentation must be on the commissioner-approved form [Directive for Alternative Infant Sleep Position](#).
- 5. The crib's firm mattress has a fitted sheet that fits tightly and cannot be dislodged easily.**

6. **Nothing is placed in the crib other than the infant’s pacifier** – The pacifier cannot have a string or clip-chain attached to it. There can be no pillows, stuffed animals, or blankets in the crib. Bumper pads are also prohibited.
7. **The above information from [Minnesota Statutes, section 245A.1435](#) Reduction of Risk of Sudden Unexpected Infant Death in Licensed Programs must be reviewed by all caregivers, and caregivers must agree to comply with the requirements in this section** - licensed child foster care providers that care for infants or children through five years of age must receive training on reducing the risk of sudden unexpected infant death and abusive head trauma from shaking infants and young children. This training must be at least one hour in length and completed at least once every five years. This does not apply to unlicensed emergency relative placements made under [Minnesota Statutes, section 245A.035](#).

Safety Hazards, Concerns, and Violations

At Initial Home Safety Walkthrough

Any obvious safety hazards or concerns and any follow-up required is documented on the home safety checklist form. Before recommending licensure, workers must document that all safety hazards and concerns have been addressed including the date each item was corrected.

Annual or Relicensing Walkthroughs or Routine Visits

Correction orders are issued for any home safety checklist violation identified during relicensing, annual reviews, or routine visits. The intent of a correction order is to immediately address any home safety violation and to document when and how the correction was made. The intent of issuing the correction order is not to be punitive, but to ensure license holders are told exactly what the violation is and are given an opportunity to respond and work with the licensing agency to come into compliance or appeal if they disagree with the potential violation.

When a Fire Marshal Inspection is required

The following items trigger the requirement for a fire marshal inspection:

- The home is a mobile home manufactured prior to June 15th, 1976
- There is a free-standing solid fuel heating appliance, such as a wood or corn-burning stove that is self-contained (not a fireplace that is built into the wall of the home)
- A foster child will sleep in a room 50% or more below ground level
- The child foster care license will have a capacity of 4 or more

- *A hazard is identified*, and the foster home is located within a mixed occupancy building or multiple dwelling building. Examples of these buildings would be an apartment in a building that also has stores or offices, a duplex, or an apartment building.
- The agency has reasonable cause – licensors can take pictures and consult with the fire marshal at fire.code@state.mn.us if unsure if an inspection is needed.