



<http://ctbythenumbers.info/2017/12/12/health-and-safety-among-top-concerns-in-choosing-childcare-survey-finds/>

Health and Safety Among Top Concerns in Choosing Childcare, Survey Finds

ON 12/12/2017 · IN [CHILDREN](#), [COMMUNITY](#), [EDUCATION](#), [HEALTH](#), [PUBLIC SAFETY](#)

When choosing a childcare or preschool, many parents try to gather information to make their decision. Yet only 54 percent of parents were very confident that they could tell if a childcare option would be safe and healthy for their child, according to a new national survey. Beyond that challenge, 2 out of 3 parents said it's hard to find childcare options with the characteristics they want.



In selecting a childcare or preschool, parents consider a variety of health, safety, educational, or practical factors. Overall, 62 percent of parents agreed that it's hard to find childcare options with the characteristics they want. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital [National Poll](#) on Children's Health asked about these factors in a national sample of parents of children age 1-5 years who attend childcare or preschool. Nearly half of parents reported their child currently attends preschool (48%), while the other half reported their child

attends either a childcare center (25%) or in-home childcare (27%) for at least 5 hours per week. Most parents (88%) felt that childcare centers and in-home childcare providers should have the same health and safety standards. Parents selected up to 5 factors they would consider *most important* when choosing a childcare or preschool. The top 5 factors differed by the child's current setting:

- **Preschool:** staff background checks (45%), active play every day (40%), doors locked (38%), staff have early childhood training (30%), and safe outdoor play area (30%)
- **Childcare center:** staff background checks (46%), staff have early childhood training (42%), doors locked (36%), cost (33%), and location/hours (32%)
- **Home childcare:** healthy foods served (28%), active play every day (28%), books/educational toys (27%), kitchen area cleaned (26%), and staff background checks (24%)

Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood provides information on its [website](#), including a "[Child Care Checklist for Parents](#)," to assist in choosing a child daycare program. It suggests asking if the program is licensed, ensuring that unannounced visits are permitted, that there is adequate staff and that the program is safe. The website also includes an "[online lookup tool](#)" to determine licensing status for family child care home providers, group child care homes, child care centers, family child care home staff-substitutes and assistants and youth camps.

A report [published](#) last month by Connecticut Voices for Children indicated that for more than a decade, Connecticut has made expanding early care and education programs and wrap-around supports a priority. The state has increased funding for early childhood programs for low-income families and communities, "making a real, sustained effort to build a strong infrastructure to support the early childhood system. Increased spending has increased both the availability and the quality of care." Those efforts, the study found, "have begun to pay off in terms of both access and quality of care."



The 39-page report indicated that:

- Almost four in every five four-year-olds enroll in preschool. As of 2016, nearly 80% of four-year-olds were enrolled in preschool, an increase of six percentage points since 2005.
- Disparities in preschool access have narrowed. The gap in preschool experience rates between the large urban districts and the wealthiest suburban districts has narrowed from 40 percent in 2003 to just 26 percent in 2016.
- State programs are serving more infants and toddlers. Head Start and Child Day Care Centers have shifted to address more of the state's need for infant and toddler care. Combined, they serve almost 80% more infants and toddlers in 2016 than in 2005.

The report stressed, however, that as of 2016, center-based infant/toddler care is affordable to only 25 percent of Connecticut families with a young child. Child care for two young children is affordable to only seven percent of such families. The need for infant/toddler care "continues to vastly outstrip statewide capacity," and community wealth "continues to predict both preschool access and later test scores."

In the national poll, parents identified deal-breakers in selecting childcare – characteristics that would eliminate a preschool or childcare from their consideration. Over half said location in a sketchy area or a gun on the premises would be a deal-breaker; others were: non-staff adults on the premises, unvaccinated children allowed to attend, and having a staff person who smoked.

Some factors rated as most important by the Mott Poll parents may be reflected in the policies of the facility. These include whether staff undergo background checks prior to hiring, whether staff have early childhood certification or training, and whether child and staff members must be vaccinated. For many preschools and childcare centers, this type of information can be found on the facility's website; it may be more difficult to find such information for in-home childcare providers, the poll analysis pointed out.