

Child care rules require us to take infants outdoors each day even in the winter. Parents often object, fearing their babies will catch colds or become too chilly. How can we reassure parents?

In North Carolina's moderate climate infants are able to go outside nearly every day. Sometimes it's difficult to judge when weather conditions are safe, especially with infants, whose small bodies lose heat quickly in cold weather. Wind chill factors can make a chilly day even colder. How do you decide when it's safe to take children outside in winter? The Child Care Weather Watch, located at www.idph.state.ia.us/hcci/products/weatherwatch.pdf provides guidelines for child care providers regarding temperature that may be dangerous for outdoor play. Call us at 800-367-2229 to request a copy. Below are general guidelines to follow.

- When temperatures are at or below 20° F, including wind chill factor, infants should not go outside.
- When temperatures are between 21-32° F, outdoor time should be limited to 20-30 minutes.

Reassure parents about the benefits of fresh air. Getting outside each day helps keep infants healthy. Infectious disease organisms are less concentrated outdoors so children are less likely to re-breathe the groups' germs. Light exposure to the skin helps provide the child's body with vitamin D.

Take precautions to make sure infants stay warm.

- Bundle children in warm layered clothing.
- Make sure clothing is dry.
- Check children's hands and feet every 15 minutes in cold weather for color and warmth.

Even a short period outdoors will benefit babies and providers, providing a chance to breathe fresh air, feel the cool wind on their faces and get a bit of sunlight on their skin.