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Participant in a Virtual Table Talk Thursday June 25<sup>th</sup>, 12:45-1:45.**

Research suggests that children learn best through play, and the best place for play is outdoors, where children connect with nature, explore their physical abilities, spark their curiosity and develop a sense of place and belonging in the world. Updates to Child Care Licensing regulations can play an important role in leading change that is necessary to ensure children have access to these engaging, essential experiences while in child care settings.

The following recommendations are taken from [Outdoor Play in Child Care Settings: Recommendations for Child Care Licensing in Alberta](https://getoutsideandplay.ca/licensing-regulation-project/) (<https://getoutsideandplay.ca/licensing-regulation-project/>). This report, released in the fall of 2019, was created with a grant from the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, Recreation and Sports Division. It was reviewed and supported by 18 leaders in the field including operators, early childhood educators, post-secondary instructors and representatives from the Ministry of Children's Services and Licensing. The full report gives specific regulation recommendations to improve access to quality outdoor play experiences for children in child care settings.

In this submission, I will focus on the top three recommendations that limit the costs and burden on operators while still providing quality outdoor play.

## Materials

Children access the same outdoor space every day while in child care. The features and materials found in these spaces need to offer children a full range of learning and play experiences. These spaces must become complete learning environments that support individual children's needs and all different types of play and learning.

Many play spaces in child care settings are dominated by a static metal play structure and plastic toys, often with rubber or artificial turf as the groundcover. Nature is hard to find, yet there is evidence that natural features and loose parts have positive effects on children's play, social behaviour and mental health.

This is the easiest regulation change to enhance outdoor play. Programs need materials and this change simply clarifies the expectations for these materials.

Current Regulation	Proposed Change
<p>A license holder must ensure that outdoor play equipment and play materials are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Safe and maintained in good repair,</li> <li>b. Developmentally appropriate for children, and</li> <li>c. Of sufficient quantity and variety for children.</li> </ul>	<p>A license holder must ensure that outdoor play equipment and play materials are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Safe and maintained in good repair,</li> <li>b. Developmentally appropriate for children, and</li> <li>c. Of sufficient quantity and variety for children.</li> <li><b>d. Address all learning need of children and</b></li> <li><b>e. Engage children with the natural world.</b></li> </ul>

**Time**

One of the best ways to ensure children are getting outside is to have the regulations outline a minimum daily outdoor play requirement. This regulation change would not add any extra cost to operators but could spark change in how program planning occurs, with the outdoor space being viewed as equally important to indoor space, resulting in more engaging spaces and experiences for children outdoors.

The regulation addition supports the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines as research shows that children move more and sit less when they play outside. Increasing outdoor time will increase physical activity.

Current Regulation	Proposed Change
<p><b>Daycare and Group Family Care</b> There is no mention of the amount time.</p>	<p><b>Full-time programs</b> Children will be outside at least twice a day for a minimum of: 60 minutes/day for children 12months-&lt;3years. 90 minutes/day for children ages 3-5 years. <b>Part-time programs</b> Children will be outside once a day for a minimum: 30 minutes/day for children ages 12months-&lt;3years. 45 minutes/day for children ages 3-5 years.</p>
<p><b>Out of School Care</b> There is no mention of the amount time.</p>	<p><b>Full-day programs</b> (vacation, professional development days etc.) Children will be outside at least twice a day for a minimum of 90 minutes/day. <b>Part-day programs</b> Children will be outside at least once a day for a minimum total of 45 minutes/day.</p>
<p><b>Pre-school</b> There is no mention of the amount time.</p>	<p>Children will be outside at least twice a week for a total of 60 minutes/week.</p>

If regulations are going to indicate an amount of outdoor time, there must be additional regulations or clear policy guidance from licensing regarding safe conditions to be outside. See the full report for a specific recommendation on this.

### Space

Running, jumping, hiding, creating, building, contemplating - children need space for all these activities and so much more when they are outdoors. Alberta has the lowest amount of space requirements for children in child care settings across Canada.

Current Regulation	Proposed Change
<p><b>Daycare</b>            Child under 19 months 2m<sup>2</sup>            Children over 19 months 4.5m<sup>2</sup>            Outdoor space must accommodate 50% of centre capacity</p>	<p>7m<sup>2</sup>            7m<sup>2</sup>            Remove</p>
<p><b>Out of School Care</b>            There is no mention of the amount of time.</p>	<p>7m<sup>2</sup></p>
<p><b>Pre-school</b>            There is no mention of the amount of time.</p>	<p>7m<sup>2</sup></p>

If programs are asked to have larger spaces, this will increase costs for some programs as they lease their space and some programs, due to their location will not be able to increase the size of their outdoor space. One alternative would be the use of community spaces like parks or nearby nature to make up the space difference along with plans to use it regularly. Saskatchewan has done this by requiring at least half of the 7m<sup>2</sup> to be adjacent to the centre and the remainder being within walking distance. If this was implemented in Alberta, programs would need clear guidance on off-site procedures and permissions.

Changing regulations is only one piece of the puzzle, but it is an important piece. Changing regulations to support more quality outdoor play sends a signal to operators, program directors, early childhood educators and parents that this is fundamentally important to children’s well-being. All children deserve large engaging outdoor spaces and abundant time outside, it is an essential part of childhood and healthy child development.