



STATE OF MONTANA CHILD CARE DISASTER PLAN

2021



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Review

An annual review of the Montana Child Care Disaster Plan will be completed by the Lead Agency, the Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB).

Date of Review	Updated Section(s)	Page
2018	Plan created	
2019	No changes made	
2020	HCSD updated to ECFSD	4, 10
2021	Updates made throughout plan to clarify language as a result of COVID-19	

Plan Overview

Scope

The Montana Child Care Disaster Plan outlines the roles and responsibilities of key supporting agencies to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a disaster that significantly impacts a community's child care infrastructure. Through coordination of best practices for the emergency functions, gaps and duplications in key activities are minimized. Licensed child care centers, family and group child care facilities, and licensed-exempt child care are included in the plan. For the Montana Child Care Disaster Plan, the term "disaster" includes emergencies and disasters, either natural or human-caused, and other emergencies that may occur in child care.

Distribution and Posting

The Montana Child Care Disaster Plan is a public document, and is available on the ECSB website on the [Documents and Resources](#) page.

Additionally, the plan is distributed to:

- Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&R)
- Child Care Licensing (CCL)
- The Montana Early Childhood Project (ECP)
- The Best Beginnings Advisory Council (BBAC)
- The Early Childhood and Family Support Division (ECFSD)
- State Continuity & Emergency Management Office

Acronyms

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES	ACF
BEST BEGINNINGS ADVISORY COUNCIL	BBAC
CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT FUND	CCDF
CHILD CARE LICENSING	CCL
CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL AGENCY	CCR&R
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	DPHHS
EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES BUREAU	ECSB
MONTANA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT	ECP
OFFICE OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE	OPA

Purpose

The purpose of the Montana Child Care Disaster Plan is to provide clear guidance for DPHHS to respond to disasters that affect a community's child care infrastructure. The Montana Child Care Disaster Plan defines the roles and responsibilities of partner organizations to deliver critical services and support to children, families, and child care providers in the event of a disaster. This document encourages coordination of activities and collaboration for mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Montana Emergency Response Framework (MERF)

Following the federal model, the Montana Emergency Response Framework (MERF) works with different state agencies, and assigned some state agencies one or more Emergency Support Functions (ESF) based on their normal day-to-day role. ESFs are mechanisms for grouping the most frequently used functions to coordinate federal and state assistance in an emergency or disaster. This coordination provides structure for coordinating interagency support in response to an incident.

The MERF allows flexibility for all the state agencies to work together to support each ESF. Some state agencies not assigned a primary ESF role may support other agencies in an ESF role.

Mitigation

Mitigation describes measures that lessen the impact of disasters. Routine mitigation practices identify and correct potentially unsafe conditions on a regular basis. For example, state agencies can strengthen their disaster response infrastructure by establishing and communicating disaster response policies before a disaster occurs. By investing in long-term strategies, state agencies can positively impact the safety, economic security, and resilience of children, families, and child care providers.



Preparedness

Preparedness ensures that child care programs are ready for emergencies in order to protect the health and safety of children and staff members and to prevent damage to buildings and equipment. The preparedness phase includes being informed, making plans, assigning roles and responsibilities, writing emergency response plans, conducting training and drills, building relationships with local emergency response teams, identifying local resources, and keeping emergency supplies up-to-date.

Response

The response phase refers to the time when the emergency actually occurs. The response phase may begin with warnings and alerts. Response begins at the local level (city or county) supported by response activities and resources from regional, state, and federal response partners. Emergency responders include organizations such as hospitals, businesses, faith-based organizations, volunteer and charitable agencies, and non-governmental and community-based organizations.

Recovery

The recovery phase refers to the hours, days, weeks, months or possibly years, after an emergency occurs. It includes plans for assisting children, families, and child care programs to return to their everyday routines by providing resources and health services (including mental and behavioral health), employment, stable housing, financial assistance, and child care.

Assumptions

- Child care is an integral and essential part of a community's economic viability and should be restored as soon as possible following an emergency event.
- Licensed child care providers have their own emergency and disaster plan, train and exercise these plans, and disseminate them to parents.
- CCR&Rs play an essential role in providing timely information to providers, parents, and communities

- As required by Licensing, providers should have food, water and supplies to take care of children during an emergency or disaster.
- This document is consistent with other local, state and federal disaster planning documents related to caring for the needs of young children.
- Families may need temporary assistance with respite care for their children while they work in the recovery phase following an emergency or disaster.
- The steps to be followed when responding to the needs of a community will vary depending on the particular emergency or disaster and the geographic area involved, extent of the damage and auxiliary services available.

Coordinating and Collaborating with Key Partners

Plan Development

- The plan was developed in consultation with the Best Beginnings Advisory Council, CCL, CCR&Rs, ECFSD, Head Start, and additional early childhood stakeholders.
- The plan was developed in collaboration with the State Continuity & Emergency Management Office, and formalizes coordination with child care within statewide emergency planning.

Consultation and Coordination

Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&R)

The CCR&R regional agencies are required to maintain, and train staff annually on their agency Emergency Preparedness Plan; which contains a Continuity of Operations plan (COOP), and a Devolution Plan. The Emergency Preparedness plan, COOP, and the Devolution of Operations plans are reviewed by each agency's Emergency Work Group Committee on an annual basis. Changes are made to the plan as changes occur. The plan includes a working strategy to create, administer and staff an Emergency Child Care Center for rescue and relief workers and a "guardian" program to help staff the center in an emergency. CCR&Rs work with their local city/county emergency preparedness committee to build awareness of efforts in the event that a significant natural event should occur.

For continuity planning, an updated roster for members on the guardian plan is submitted with the revised plans annually. This information is essential in the event that the CCR&R regional agency duties need to be devolved to another agency. If a significant natural event occurs in the local service area, which impacts families and/or providers, the following will occur:

- The agency will check in with the child care providers in the affected areas to see if they are in need of any resources;
- If the provider has to evacuate, the agency within that service area will assist in getting information to the families of the children in the programs and act as a communication resource for families and child care providers. Methodology for informing families should be included in the emergency preparedness plan;
- Report to ECSB within 24 hours any information necessary related to the significant natural event.

Child Care Licensing (CCL)

Consultation and coordination with CCL ensures that providers engage in emergency preparedness and planning activities, including distribution of materials and resources to assist child care providers.

State Partners

Additionally, ECSB coordinated with the following state partners in the development of the plan:

- State Head Start Collaboration Office
- STARS Preschool state leadership
- Montana Preschool Development Grant and Office of Public Instruction state leadership
- State public health agency, the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS)
- State Continuity & Emergency Management Office.
- Voluntary organizations that provide support for child care and provision of temporary child care or respite care services, if needed. These organizations will be solicited by:
 - Best Beginnings Advisory Council members
 - Local Best Beginnings Coalition members
 - CCR&R leadership
- Local business owners and non-profit organizations to donate supplies (e.g., bottled water and first aid supplies) to child care providers to stock emergency kits. These organizations will be solicited by:
 - Best Beginnings Advisory Council members
 - Local Best Beginnings Coalition members
 - CCR&R leadership
- Tribal communities and agencies
 - Coordination occurs between the Lead Agency Administrator and the Tribal CCDF Administrators
- The plan includes coordination across state jurisdictional lines, particularly in border states, which may serve families that must be evacuated from disaster areas.
 - Coordination occurs between the Lead Agency Administrator and Administrators of other states and territories
 - Montana may also enter into intergovernmental arrangements with neighboring provinces of Canada for the purpose of exchanging disaster and emergency services ([MCA 10-3-204](#)).

Guidelines for Continuation of Child Care Subsidies and Services

Provisions for continuing core CCDF program functions

- Continuing Best Beginnings Scholarship Program payments to CCDF providers or extending eligibility re-determinations for families, etc.) will be coordinated by ECSB management, CCR&R management, and supporting staff during and after a disaster.
- Core function continuation will be managed by the State Continuity & Emergency Management Office by using the Early Childhood Services COOP

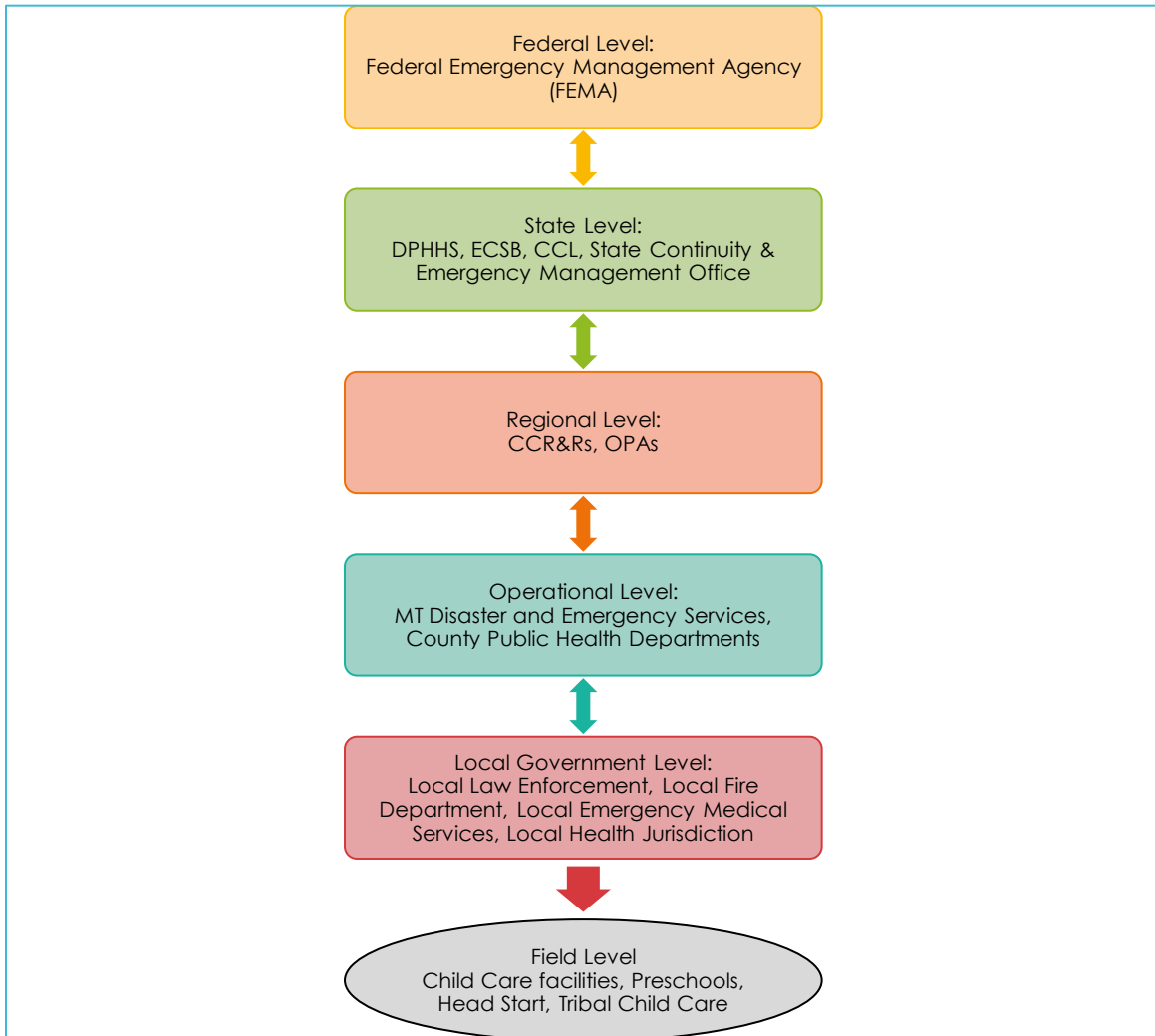
Strategic communications, decision-making, and information sharing

Communication is critical to the success handling of any disaster, emergency, or incident. ECSB has outlined state-level protocols below.

Communication Protocols

- DPHHS is the official disseminator of state-level information about child care following a disaster.
 - Disseminated information, including revised child care rules and policies, should flow from DPHHS to the partner and stakeholder agencies, especially to CCR&Rs, who can forward the information to providers and families after a disaster.
- Child care providers are one of the best purveyors of information to families. Therefore, it is essential that child care providers have access to the most accurate, current information when there has been a disaster.
- DPHHS is responsible for consolidating provider and family information for release to ACF. At the discretion of ACF, DPHHS will add information about the child care infrastructure, such as:
 - The disaster impact to DPHHS, CCR&R offices
 - Impact to child care facilities
 - Resources needed to resume services
 - Anticipated date of a fully operational child care system post-disaster, or
 - Any other related information
- After a disaster, a review of the communication protocols will be conducted to determine what can be improved.

Communication Levels



Continuing payments to child care providers during and after a disaster

- The Early Childhood Services Bureau will temporarily continue to pay providers for absence days in the event that children are unable to attend due to a disaster (e.g., pandemic flu).
 - [Child Care Policy Manual section 6-6: Absent Days and Continuity of Care](#)

ECSB Role

In the event of a disaster, ECSB will execute their COOP with the support of the State Continuity & Emergency Management Office. The purpose of the ECSB COOP is to help ensure that business processes can continue during a time of emergency or disaster.

The COOP addresses the following as Priority 1, which means this process will be functional within 24 hours of a disaster:

- Procedures that address systems data security and data storage to ensure adequate backup of family and child care provider records after a disaster.
- Mechanism to collect data and track families receiving subsidies and providers serving subsidized children that are impacted by a disaster.
- Provisions for continuing services to families in the event CCR&Rs are unable to conduct eligibility re-determinations or families are unable to submit necessary documentation.
- Provisions to continue assistance for families that are temporarily out of work or engaged in job search after a disaster.
 - [*Child Care Policy Manual section 6-6: Absent Days and Continuity of Care*](#)
 - [*Administrative Rules of Montana 37.80.201: Nonfinancial Requirements for Eligibility and Priority for Assistance*](#)
- ECSB anticipates an increased need for child care subsidies among families impacted by a disaster in addition to families already receiving assistance. ECSB will meet these needs in coordination with CCR&Rs and child care providers.
- Provisions to quickly establish and manage a waiting list for families needing assistance.
 - Currently, Montana does not have a waiting list.
- Coordination with CCL, emergency management officials, voluntary organizations, and CCR&R agencies to implement temporary child care services after a disaster, including establishment of contracts or agreements.

CCL Role

During a disaster, CCL is responsible for coordinating the following efforts:

- Training and identifying pre-approved child care providers that have undergone criminal history and background checks who are willing to assist with provision of temporary child care after a disaster.
 - Collaborate with CCR&Rs to support this objective
- Temporary operating standards (or provisions for temporarily waiving certain child care regulatory requirements) to accommodate providers that need to re-locate and/or the provision of temporary child care in alternate facilities, such as shelters.
 - Collaborate with CCR&Rs to support this objective

Coordination of Post-Disaster Recovery of Child Care Services

CCR&Rs, with the guidance and support from ECFSD, are responsible for the following post-disaster efforts:

- Provide ongoing technical assistance, training, resources, and support to child care providers to help them better prepare for emergencies and disasters.
- Work with emergency management officials, CCL, and ECSB to conduct timely assessments of the damage to and status of child care providers within the impacted area.
- Engagement and training strategies for child care providers to ensure business continuity should a disaster occur, including topics on adequate insurance coverage and protection of records and assets after a disaster.
- Providing information and resources to child care providers about financial assistance that is available for the restoring or rebuilding process if that is necessary.

- Engaging business associations, community development financial institutions, and other organizations that can potentially provide financial assistance or micro-loans to help providers re-open.
- Preparedness planning with FEMA regional officials to clarify child care services that are eligible for reimbursement under the Public Assistance program.
- Provisions to quickly establish and manage temporary child care in non-traditional settings when existing child care facilities have been temporarily or permanently damaged.

Requirements for CCDF Providers and Other Child Care Providers

Procedures for evacuation, relocation, shelter-in-place, and lock down

ARM 37.95.124 requires that “all child care facilities must have a written emergency disaster plan. The plan for each structure used for child care must be developed in such a way that the plan can be followed in the event of a natural or human-caused disaster, such as flood, fire, tornado, or responding to an intruder. Written emergency plans must include *plans for evacuation, including identification of at least one off-site gathering point*; plans for evacuation of non-mobile children and children with special health care needs; contingencies that address children's individual needs; staff responsibilities; plans for reunification of children with their parents; *plans for shelter in place and lock down*; and plans for continuity of operation. Facilities must have on site an emergency supply of blankets, water, food, and supplies.”

Procedures for staff and volunteer emergency preparedness training and practice drills

ARM 37.95.124 requires that a facility to conduct *ten emergency drills per year to include eight fire drills; and two other disaster drills* that are likely to occur in the facility. “All emergency drills must be documented and include the following minimum information: who conducted the drill; date and time of drill; the number of adults and children present during the drill; the length of time to evacuate; and problems identified during the drill and corrective actions. Emergency plans must be submitted prior to license approval.”

ARM 37.95.163 requires that *Early Childhood Teachers complete a 2- hour emergency preparedness and response course* as part of their orientation. This course walks through all the steps to prepare for an emergency including the relocation plan, shelter in place plan and evacuation plan and how to create an emergency go kit.

Procedures for communication and reunification with families

ARM 37.95.124 requires that “all child care facilities must have a written emergency disaster plan. The plan for each structure used for child care must be developed in such a way that the plan can be followed in the event of a natural or human-caused disaster, such as flood, fire, tornado, or responding to an intruder. Written emergency plans must include *plans for evacuation, including identification of at least one off-site gathering point*; plans for evacuation of non-mobile children and children with special health care needs; contingencies that address children's individual needs; staff responsibilities; *plans for reunification of children with their parents*; plans for shelter in

place and lock down; and plans for continuity of operation. Facilities must have on site an emergency supply of blankets, water, food, and supplies."

Procedures for continuity of operations

In cases of emergency relocation, it may be prohibitive for a child care facility to maintain compliance with all requirements and inspection processes. To accommodate continuity of services, CCL will allow temporary modifications to rule, policy, and/or processes when necessary. Temporary operating standards must meet basic health and safety standards.

Child care facilities who relocate because of a disaster or other emergency must communicate to CCL a Temporary Operating Plan within 72 hours of relocation.

A Temporary Operating Plan must include the following:

- Address of temporary facility
- Expected length of time at temporary location, if known
- Plan for any modifications to licensing requirements
- For Child Care Centers, current fire and health inspection information, if available

The licensing worker will work with the facility to ensure plans meet basic health and safety standards. The licensing worker will conduct an on-site inspection of the temporary facility within 90 days. Temporary Operating Plans, including status updates, will be communicated with ECSB.

Procedures for accommodation of infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and children with chronic medical conditions

[ARM 37.95.124](#) requires that *"all child care facilities must have a written emergency disaster plan. The plan for each structure used for child care must be developed in such a way that the plan can be followed in the event of a natural or human-caused disaster, such as flood, fire, tornado, or responding to an intruder. Written emergency plans must include plans for evacuation, including identification of at least one off-site gathering point; plans for evacuation of non-mobile children and children with special health care needs; contingencies that address children's individual needs; staff responsibilities; plans for reunification of children with their parents; plans for shelter in place and lock down; and **plans for continuity of operation**. Facilities must have on site an emergency supply of blankets, water, food, and supplies."*

Disaster Planning Resources for Providers and Families

Disaster Planning Resources for Child Care Providers

- ☑ [Post-Disaster Child Care Needs and Resources](#): The Post-Disaster Child Care Needs and Resources document is designed to address the challenges that families and child care providers (including centers, in-home, and family child care providers) may experience following a disaster.
- ☑ [Disaster Planning and Recovery Basics for Child Care Facilities](#): Child Care Aware of America works with partners on nationwide efforts to train and ensure that child care providers have a plan. They also raise awareness and promote effective policies to ensure that children are safe before, during, and after a disaster and that child care is considered in each community as part of rebuilding efforts after a disaster has occurred.

- ☑ [Commonly Used Sheltering Items](#): This document contains a catalog of commonly used sheltering items and identifies basic commodities necessary to sustain infants and children in mass care shelters and emergency congregate care environments.

Disaster Planning Resources for Families

- ☑ [Family Plans](#): Families may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to plan in advance; how will you contact one another, who will you designate an out of town contact, and how will you get back together?
- ☑ [Feeling Safe, Being Safe](#): This training resource describes steps that can be taken to be better prepared by creating an emergency worksheet, creating a personalized emergency kit, and practicing evacuations plans, amongst other actions.
- ☑ [Ready Kids](#): Build an emergency preparedness kit, learn about different types of disasters, and find out how to get involved.

Helping Children to cope with Disasters

Disasters are upsetting experiences for everyone involved. The emotional toll that disasters bring can sometimes be even more devastating than the financial strains of damages, the loss of a home, business or property. Children may cope more effectively with a disaster when they feel they understand what is happening and what they can do to help protect themselves, their family, and friends.

- ☑ [Coping with Disasters](#): This website offers guidance on how to recognize signs of disaster-related stress, easing stress, helping kids cope with a disaster and reassuring children after a disaster.
- ☑ [Talking to Children about Disasters](#): This resource provides basic information on how to help children understand what is happening, without providing unnecessary details that may only harm them.
- ☑ [How to help children cope with disasters](#): Parents, teachers, grandparents and other caregivers can be concerned about how dramatic images of and discussion about tragic events will affect the emotional well-being of their children. This resource offers tips on how to communicate with children and help them cope.
- ☑ [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\) Helping Children Cope with Disaster](#): Young people react to trauma differently than adults. Some may react right away; others may show signs that they are having a difficult time much later. As such, adults do not always know when a child needs help coping. This tip sheet will help parents, caregivers, and teachers learn some common reactions among different age groups and how to respond in a helpful way.
- ☑ [The National Center for Child Traumatic Stress](#): Leads the Network in its efforts to increase access to services and raise the standard of care for children and their families across the United States who have experienced trauma.
- ☑ [National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement](#)
- ☑ [Online Clearinghouse Quick Find on Crisis Prevention and Response](#): Offers resources on crisis assistance and prevention, responding to a crisis at school, school's role in addressing psychological reaction to loss and much more.

- ☑ [Save the Children's Journey of Hope](#): Tips to support teens who have experienced an emergency incident, and for parents to support themselves and their children in recovering from an emergency incident.