

THE AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES AND DISEASE REGISTRY SUPPORTS LAUNCH OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH COVID-19 EARLY CARE & EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S HEALTH



CHILDREN'S
ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH
NETWORK



October 14, 2020 – Meeting the urgent needs resulting from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) has awarded support for a collaborative of public health partners to work in coordination to advance environmental health capacity to implement COVID-19 guidance and safe practices in early care and education (ECE) facilities. The partner organizations include the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN), Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), and National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH).

As we have seen, environmental health practices play an important role in reducing the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in our communities, specifically environmental health practices around sanitation, disinfection, food safety, and other related considerations for the ECE environment. The need for guidance on cleaning practices is especially necessary in ECE facilities, where many children spend a majority of their active hours during the day and may be at increased risk for exposure to COVID-19 and other environmental health hazards. Children are more susceptible to environmental health hazards than adults due to a smaller body weight, underdeveloped brain and immune system, and an increased tendency to put their hands in their mouths. Resources developed from this project will provide ECE providers and health departments with the ability to improve environmental health for children during COVID-19, supporting their critical roles in protecting children's health.

Learn more about the partner organizations and the importance of this effort below.

“Environmental health professionals play a critical assurance role in the health and safety of families at this time in our nation's history,” said Dr. David Dyjack, NEHA executive director. “We are honored to facilitate this collaborative that will provide tools and resources to the environmental health workforce in support of our efforts to ensure every child reaches their full potential free from recognized risks in the environment.”

“CEHN is excited to bring much needed health and environmental health resources to overstretched and underfunded childcare providers. The current COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities in current childcare systems in the U.S. Through funding from ATSDR, we will increase childcare professionals' access to science-based, environmental health best practices and develop the capacity of childcare professionals to address common and concerning environmental hazards including exposure to harmful chemicals found in cleaning and disinfecting products,” said Nsedu Obot-Witherspoon, CEHN executive director.

“Since children can spend over one third of their day in childcare outside the home, it is important that facility staff take preventative steps to minimize environmental health hazards. In a year where there is not only the hazard of COVID-19 but also possible environmental health impacts of disinfectants used to fight the virus, it is more important than ever to provide our members with the best available guidance on cleaning practices for ECE facilities. ASTHO has been working with our members, federal agencies, and association partners since January to ensure state and territorial agencies have the resources they need to effectively respond to COVID-19. We look forward to working with this group on response efforts targeting children’s environmental health,” said James Blumenstock, senior vice president for pandemic response and recovery at ASTHO.

“COVID-19 has highlighted the role that public health plays in all aspects of daily life, no matter what one’s age is. A crucial mission of local health departments that NACCHO proudly represents is safeguarding the health and safety of the most vulnerable of us—in this instance, our young children. NACCHO welcomes participating in this important work and looks forward to supporting local health departments and others as they work to ensure all children have access to safe and clean spaces, particularly during COVID-19,” said Lori Freeman, NACCHO chief executive officer.

“As people spend more time indoors, it is critical that they have the right information on how to keep their homes and workplaces safe and healthy, and that is especially true for vulnerable populations including young children. NCHH is excited to participate in this collaboration and work with our partners to support children’s environmental health,” said Amanda Reddy, NCHH executive director.

[Learn More About Each Partnering Organization](#)

The [Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry’s Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education](#) program encourages careful consideration about where to locate ECE sites. Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education gives towns, cities, and states a framework to adopt practices that will make sure ECE programs are located away from chemical hazards. This program is one of many of ATSDR’s programs to support [Children’s Environmental Health](#). In addition, learn about other [children’s environmental health](#) resources from NEHA.

About NEHA

The [National Environmental Health Association](#) (NEHA) was established in 1937 to advance the environmental health professional for the purpose of providing a healthful environment for all. Currently serving over 6,000 members, NEHA empowers and educates these professionals, providing the tools and resources they need to make the greatest contributions possible in creating healthy environments that we all seek.

About ASTHO

The [Association of State and Territorial Health Officials](#) (ASTHO) is the national, nonprofit organization representing public health agencies in the U.S., its territories, and the District of Columbia, as well as the over 100,000 public health professionals these agencies employ. ASTHO members, the chief health officials of these jurisdictions, formulate and influence sound public health policy and ensure excellence in state-based public health practice. ASTHO’s primary function is to track, evaluate, and advise members on the impact and formation of public or private health policy that may affect them and to provide them with guidance and technical assistance on improving the nation’s health.

About CEHN

[Children's Environmental Health Network](#) (CEHN) is a national, multidisciplinary, nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect the developing child and developing fetus from environmental health hazards and promote a healthier environment. CEHN has been working at the national level for nearly 30 years on policy, education, and support of pediatric research vital to children's environmental health. CEHN has partnered with local and national professional and advocacy organizations and local, state, and federal government agencies. CEHN has also worked with a wide range of stakeholders including parents, youth, legislators, researchers, physicians, nurses, clergy, and childcare professionals. CEHN's [Eco-Healthy Child Care](#) program has worked nationally for over 10 years to partner with childcare professionals to eliminate or reduce environmental health hazards found in early childhood learning environments.

About NACCHO

The mission of the [National Association of County and City Health Officials](#) (NACCHO) is to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for local health departments. NACCHO is the only organization dedicated to serving every local health department in the nation. NACCHO serves 3,000 local health departments and is the leader in providing cutting edge, skill building, professional resources and programs, seeking health equity, and supporting effective local public health practice and systems.

About NCHH

The mission of the [National Center for Healthy Housing](#) (NCHH) is to secure healthy homes for all. Through partnerships, community-based research, and advocacy, NCHH reduces health disparities by translating credible science into tools and catalyzing systems change in low-income communities. With more than six million families living in substandard housing, NCHH equips leaders in the public health, housing, and environmental sectors with the data, tools, policies, and best practices they need to improve housing quality in their communities.