NATURE AND SENSORY-BASED ITEMS IN CHILD CARE CENTRES

When introducing nature or sensory-based items into the child care environment, follow these guidelines to help keep children safe and healthy:

- Assess items for potential risks, including allergens, choking hazards, toxic or poisonous materials, rust, sharp edges, splinters, and objects that may puncture the skin (such as thorns, sticks, or sharp shells)
- Store items in clean, dry, labelled containers
- Regularly inspect items and immediately remove any that are damaged, unsafe, soiled or no longer suitable for use
- During an outbreak, remove nature and sensory-based items that cannot be effectively cleaned, disinfected, or laundered. They can be returned or replaced once the outbreak has been declared over or as per public health recommendations
- Ensure children and staff perform hand hygiene before and after engaging with nature and sensory-based play items

Items	Guidelines
Dried natural items (e.g., freshly fallen leaves, sticks, and rocks)	• Must be clean, dry, and free of visible contamination • They are replaced when wet or damaged
Dried food products (e.g., pasta, rice, beans, and grains)	• Must be clean, dry, and free of visible contamination • They are replaced when wet or damaged
Recycled plastic items (e.g., yogurt containers and plastic tubs)	• Must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before use • Must be discarded if cracked, damaged, or unable to be cleaned and disinfected
Cardboard items (e.g., crackers and cereal boxes)	• Must be clean, dry, and free of visible contamination • They are replaced when wet or damaged • Avoid used egg cartons due to contamination from raw eggs • Avoid cardboard boxes previously used to store any raw meat due to potential contamination

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Items	Guidelines
Wooden items (e.g., unsealed or sealed wooden slabs, blocks or other toys)	• Recommend to seal or treat so the surface is non-porous and allows for cleaning and disinfection • If unsealed wooden pieces are used, they must be replaced when wet or damaged • Items must be removed for the duration of an outbreak. They can be returned or replaced once outbreak has been declared over or as per public health recommendations
Garden soil	• Do not use soil that contains manure and/or fertilizer
Items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected or laundered (e.g., Zipper boards/fine motor skill items)	• Must be replaced if they become wet from a non-water source or are damaged
Foam items (e.g., open and closed-cell foam blocks, mat, toys)	**Open-cell foam (e.g., soft foam blocks, buffers)** • These items are porous and absorbent and cannot be properly cleaned or disinfected • Must be replaced if they become wet from a non-water source or damaged **Closed-cell foam (e.g., yoga mats)** • These items are non-porous and do not absorb liquid • Must be discarded if they are damaged or no longer cleanable
Indoor play sand	• Must use silica free sand
Outdoor play sand	• Must use silica free sand • Must be kept covered when not in use to keep insects and animals out • Sand must be dry before it is covered, because wet sand is an ideal place for bacteria to grow • Rake the sand regularly to remove debris, clumps or other foreign material • Don't allow pets to play in the sandbox

For more information, refer to A Public Health Guide for Child Care Providers at york.ca/ChildCareGuide.