



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE

Fire safety: guidance for childminding premises

How childminders can keep themselves and children in their care safe from fire.

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Introduction

The Welsh Government has produced this guidance to assist childminders in keeping themselves, and the children in their care, safe from fire.

This guide applies to domestic childminding premises which are already registered or applying for registration. It does not apply to other types of childcare facilities.

Fire poses a serious risk and this guide will help you, your family and any staff to achieve a fire-safe environment in your home. The purpose of the guide is to

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assist you in completing the accompanying fire risk assessment template which has been produced in consultation with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and PACEY (Professional Advice for Childcare and Early Years) Cymru for use by childminders.

CIW expects you to undertake a fire safety risk assessment to comply with the requirements relating to fire precautions in the Child Minding and Day Care (Wales) Regulations 2010, as amended and the **National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for children up to the age of 12 years**. This applies equally to both new registrations and existing services.

The NMS provides information about the fire precautions and procedures childminders must have regard to in order to comply with fire safety requirements. This guidance will help you undertake a fire risk assessment for your house or flat, and record and act on any significant findings. This fire risk assessment would form part of the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire or accident, a requirement of CIW. You should review your fire risk assessment and procedure if anything changes, such as starting to look after younger children or children with disabilities who may need more support in the event of a fire, or changes to the areas of your home you use for childminding.

You can contact your local Fire and Rescue Service for advice but they will not be able to do your fire risk assessment for you. Neither should you need to employ a specialist to do your fire risk assessment; the risk in a typical childminding setting will not be great enough to justify the expense.

The guide provides information on how best to reduce fire risk in your home and covers escape routes, fire escape plans, smoke alarms, sleeping accommodation and other general precautions. The actions you should take will depend on the particular circumstances of your home, its occupants and the children you look after. Fire safety law generally does not require people to take specific steps in all cases; it requires those responsible for premises to identify and implement measures that are appropriate to those premises and the activity that happens there. This guide will help you with that. When we say “you should...” we are referring to what we think are the best ways of ensuring fire safety. But this is just advice; it is not the law and you are not expected to make major changes to your property. Occasionally, the guide describes a firm legal

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requirement that you have to comply with; and we say “you must...” in such cases.

The examples shown in the ‘comments’ boxes are only suggestions or considerations for you to make which may assist you when completing the risk assessment form and may not be appropriate in all cases. The comments you include in your assessment should be based on the fire safety measures you have in your home.

If you need more advice about fire safety, please contact your local Fire and Rescue Service. If you carry out any work to bring your premises up to standard you should make sure it is done properly by someone who is competent.

If you have any questions about what the CIW expects of you please contact **CIW** for advice.

Fire risk assessment

As a childminder, you should try to protect anyone on your premises from harm caused by fire.

Carrying out a fire risk assessment is a crucial part of the overall fire safety of your property. It is essential that the risk assessment you carry out is specific to fire safety in your home. A general risk assessment will not be enough.

What is a fire risk assessment?

A fire risk assessment is an organised and methodical look at your property, for the potential of a fire to happen and the harm it could cause to the people in your property. You should look at your existing fire safety measures to decide whether they are good enough or if more needs to be done to reduce the risk of harm from fire. It is not enough to carry out your assessment once and then forget about it. You must keep it under review and up to date. That is particularly important if circumstances change, such as starting to look after younger

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children or children with disabilities who may need more support in the event of a fire, or changes to the areas of your home you use for childminding.

There is a [template for a fire risk assessment](#) which has been produced in consultation with CIW for use by childminders. (There are other fire risk assessment templates available).

This guide has been designed to help you complete the fire risk assessment template and to explain the different sections. Alternatively you can access via the [CIW](#) website.

A fire risk assessment is not a simple yes or no answer sheet; you have to provide information in relation to each of the questions in the comments boxes to provide an overall picture of the fire safety measures that are in place in your property.

Examples of how to complete each question on the template in conjunction with the following guidance notes are provided within [Annex A](#).

Description of your property

The information you provide within this section will help provide an overview of your home and will assist you when deciding if your existing fire safety measures are good enough or if more needs to be done to reduce the risk of harm from fire. For instance, the measures required within a bungalow will be different from those required in a two or three storey house.

Therefore, you should provide some basic details on the type of property in which you live, such as whether it is a bungalow, flat, detached house, terrace and the number of floors and bedrooms it contains.

Occupancy and childminding times and child accommodation areas

This information will provide an overview of the number and type of people within your home and identify anyone who may be at a greater risk from fire. For example, someone with a disability may find it harder to leave your home in a fire. If you identify anyone who you consider may be at more risk from fire, you can then assess what measures you should take to assist them if a fire breaks out.

Therefore, you should provide some basic details on:

- the number of people who permanently live at your property
- the number of adults and number of children (under 18s)
- what times you are going to be carrying out childminding
- how many children you will be looking after
- which areas of your property you intend to use for childminding (child accommodation areas)

If you are planning to provide overnight care you must notify CIW and receive confirmation from CIW that the arrangements you have put in place to meet the additional criteria for overnight care as detailed in the National Minimum Standards appear to be satisfactory. (You can make the notification by submitting an amended Statement of Purpose form with details of the overnight care you intend to provide).

Means of escape

This section looks at how you, your family and the children you are looking after will get out of the property in the event of a fire.

If there is a fire in your home, you should always get out, stay out, call 999 and ask for the fire brigade. You should not attempt to fight a fire yourself, whether with a fire blanket, fire extinguisher, or anything else. Doing so can easily place

you and others in danger. It follows that there is no longer any need to equip your premises with a fire blanket.

Fire escape plan

What is a fire escape plan?

In a nutshell, it is the plan that could save your life in an emergency. In a smoky, scary atmosphere, it is easy to freeze, panic and become disorientated. By planning and practising how you will escape with the whole family, and children you are looking after, you can be more confident about a safe escape.

All escape plans should mean that everyone is able to leave the house quickly and safely, and to congregate in a safe place outside. Ideally, this should be at the front of the house, where they can easily be helped by the emergency services if necessary.

You should never re-enter a burning building for any reason, even to rescue children who are trapped. That should always be left to professional firefighters, and your escape plan should reinforce that.

You should design your plan together ensuring that all the children in the household, including those you are looking after, know the plan and what to do in the unlikely event of fire occurring. Allow the children to get involved in the planning; when you take any new children review the plan and let them help with the plan.

Having a well-rehearsed fire escape plan is the best way to teach children to be fire safe. Make sure you show the children what to do so they will stay calm when it counts.

The plan should be based around the design of your home and special arrangements should be made in consideration of any young children, babies and anyone with a disability.

Research has shown that children go into a deeper sleep than adults and may not be woken by the fire alarm. Therefore, you will need to take this into account as part of your escape plan as the children may still be in a deep sleep and may become startled when woken, increasing the time required to escape.

Walk everyone through your escape routes, and agree a place where everyone will go to in the event of a fire, outside the front of the house on the road is best if possible. Make sure any route is free from obstacles; you need to be able to find your way in the dark and, possibly, in smoky conditions too.

If you provide overnight care then you will need to incorporate your night time routine into the fire escape plan.

Remember, the fire and rescue service should always be called without delay, no matter how small the fire.

Fire drills

Put your fire escape plan to the test. You should practice your fire escape plan regularly so that it becomes second nature, which means children will be less likely to panic in an emergency. If a child has been involved in planning and practising a fire escape plan, they are more likely to get out of a house fire safely.

If you provide overnight care, you should practise your fire escape plan both in the daytime and night time.

Allow children to master fire escape planning and practice before holding a fire drill at night when they are sleeping. The objective is to practice, not to frighten, so telling children there will be a drill before they go to bed can be as effective as a surprise drill.

Practice your plan regularly so that it is always fresh in everyone's minds especially when you are looking after new children.

You should record the date and time taken to evacuate. There is no set format

required for the recording of fire logs. This could be in a simple note book in which you record the drills you have undertaken or using an electronic record. Whichever method you use, it should be easily accessible.

Escape routes

The escape routes from one or two storey houses are generally straightforward. Few other provisions are necessary other than ensuring that each room used for childminding (child accommodation areas) opens directly onto a hall or stairs leading to the entrance of the house or flat, or it has a window or door through which escape can be made.

Most houses and flats built in the last twenty years will have a suitable design and layout, as long as unauthorised alterations have not been carried out, because they will have been built to modern building standards. Older houses and flats may still be suitable but more thought about where children are looked after will be necessary.

Layout

Sometimes due to the layout of your property you may have to go through one room to get to the room where the child accommodation area is.

Where you have to pass through another room before you can reach the hall or stairs increases the risk of you being cut off by a fire and usually a smoke alarm is needed in the room next to the hall or stairs. You should never have to go through two rooms to reach the hall or stairs.

Clear routes

To enable you, your family and any children that you are looking after to escape safely from your property, you should never store things such as pushchairs etc in halls and stairways. Any items, however small, could obstruct and hinder your way out in an emergency.

Securing doors and exits

Normally, all exits should be able to be easily opened by adults, preferably without the use of a key. If children are likely to be able to reach this and could be in danger outside then a simple bolt at a higher level may be acceptable.

At the times you are childminding, the doors at any final exit such as front door, back door and so on should, where practical, be capable of being opened by an adult from the inside without using a key (for example, using a handle, a turnbuckle [a lock that you turn] or similar). For security purposes, you may have a security chain. This is the preferred standard; however, some modern doors cannot be fitted with turnbuckles or other security devices. Where this is not practical, or a different form of lock is in place, a key should be kept in a secure place close to the exit so easily accessible to all adults, or all adults present should carry a key to the door with them at all times.

If any exit in your home leads into an enclosed garden or yard that is less than 10m long and does not give access to a road or back lane then this is not considered a suitable place of safety.

If any exit to your home leads into an enclosed garden or yard, then where possible, this area should have a door or gate you can go through to escape. If this is not possible, then people should be able to escape to a point at least 10 metres away from the building.

Protected escape routes

When someone refers to fire protection in your home they mean the walls, partitions and doors which form a physical barrier between the rooms of your home and the internal escape route, for example stairwells, corridors and hallways. This barrier will have a degree of fire resistance which will restrict the spread of fire, heat and smoke into the escape route and protect people during escape.

Walls should provide 30 minutes fire resistance (a traditional built wall in the

majority of types of property will provide 30 minutes fire resistance). Doors to rooms that you have to pass to get to an exit from your property, with the exception of bathrooms and toilets, should provide 20 minutes fire resistance. This information is provided for guidance only to aid your plans, you are not expected to make major changes to your property.

Internal doors within properties come in various types and styles; for example, solid wood, fully glazed, half glazed and light weight hollow construction. All doors will provide some level of protection from fire depending on their type and whether they are closed or open.

Certain types of doors are known as 'Fire Doors'. Fire doors are specially designed doors that will prevent the spread of fire and smoke for at least 30 minutes. They also have self-closing devices which close the door behind you.

The purpose of a 'fire door' is to protect your escape route and allow you and everyone in the property to escape before your escape route becomes impassable due to fire and smoke.

A solid wood door that closes tightly into the door frame can also protect your escape route long enough to allow everyone in the property to escape, if it is closed.

Where you carry out childminding will determine the type of fire protection you may need to protect your escape routes. The amount of smoke alarms and heat alarms that are fitted, their locations and types will also determine the level of fire resistance that is required.

On occasions it may be easier and more cost effective to add additional smoke alarms than to change doors to rooms. For further advice, contact your local Fire and Rescue Service.

If your home has a sprinkler system throughout, as all new homes built in Wales since 2016 do, then there is less need for a protected escape route. This is because sprinkler systems can usually extinguish or contain fires before they spread allowing more time for you, your family and any children that you are looking after to safely escape.

Stairwells and fire escape from upper floors

Where the upper floors of your property are to be used for childminding i.e. sleeping either during the daytime or overnight, you must take into consideration how you are going to be able to escape if there was a fire on the floors below. There are generally two ways of escaping from upper floors in the event of a fire; via your stairs or the use of an emergency window both are covered below.

On certain occasions during the day it may be necessary for you to use rooms such as bathrooms on the upper floors although childminding predominantly takes place on the ground floor. On these occasions, you will be awake and aware of your fire alarm going off and should have sufficient time to leave from the upper floor before your escape route becomes impassable.

Stairs

In all properties with more than one floor there will be stairs to enable you to access the other floors and forms part of the escape route from these floors. In some properties, the stairs will be 'protected' (enclosed with a physical barrier) for example you will not need to go through or into another room to get to your front door, or alternatively you may have an open plan property where you will have to go through or into another room to get to your front door for example 'open' stair.

Protected (enclosed) stairs

Protected stairs lead directly to the front door without having to pass through another door or another room other than a hallway or landing and are enclosed by a physical barrier between the rooms of your home for example walls, partitions and doors which will provide a degree of fire resistance that will restrict the spread of fire, heat and smoke into the escape route for a limited time. A protected stair is designed to provide a 'fire safe' (protected) route for you and your family to escape from your property at your own pace.

Open stairs

In some properties the stair does not lead directly to the front door without having to pass through another door or another room other than a hallway or landing, therefore will not provide a 'fire safe' (protected) route for you and your family to escape from your property. Therefore, you may need to have some additional measures in place to ensure you can safely escape from any upper floors in the event of a fire, such as:

- Inter connected smoke alarms in all rooms
- Emergency escape windows in the first floor bedrooms or lower ground floor rooms
- A sprinkler system throughout your property

Escape windows

The use of windows for escape should only ever be considered in an emergency situation and as a last resort; they should not form part of your usual fire escape plan.

However, escape windows can be considered as an alternative escape route from the first floor within a fire escape plan providing a second, emergency escape (only if your first escape route is not possible). If you were trapped on an upper floor, you can use the window to call for assistance or to supply fresh air whilst awaiting rescue. If the conditions within the room worsen, for example smoke starts to enter or it becomes too hot, you could then use the window to escape. Unless the window provides access to the roof of an extension or outbuilding, this would involve lowering yourself to the ground, which involves some degree of risk and should only be considered as a last resort.

If you have or are looking after young children, then they should not be able to open a window without an adult being around. You must consider the safety of any children who may have access to rooms where an escape window is provided providing window locks or restrictors will help with this. Where locks are provided, all adults present must be able to easily access a key to the windows

in the case of an emergency.

Escape windows must have an openable area of at least 0.33m² and have all sides at least 450mm long. The opening should be a maximum of 1100mm above the floor. All modern windows installed on upper floors should already meet these standards.

Night time routine

You are at more risk of a fire when you are asleep, and many fires in the home start at night. If childminding is going to take place overnight in your property you should introduce a night time fire safety routine to help keep you, your family and any children that you are looking after safe.

A night time fire safety routine should include the following:

- Close all inside doors to prevent smoke spreading if a fire starts
- Switch off and unplug electrical appliances, unless they are designed to be left on such as fridges and freezers
- Check your cooker is turned off
- Do not go to sleep with the washing machine, tumble dryer or dishwasher on
- Make sure all heaters are turned off (does not include central heating)
- Do not leave mobile phones, tablets or e-cigarettes charging overnight
- Make sure all exit routes are clear
- Keep door and window keys where everyone can find them
- Take your mobile phone with you and ensure keys are stored in an appropriate place to ensure you can escape in the event of an emergency
- Ensure mobility aids are close to hand for those who require them

Overnight care should not take place until you have notified CIW and received confirmation from CIW that the arrangements that you have put in place to meet the additional criteria for overnight care as detailed in the National Minimum Standards appear to be satisfactory. You make the notification by submitting an amended Statement of Purpose with details of the overnight care you intend to provide.

Reducing the risk from fire

As part of your Fire Risk Assessment you should assess what may cause a fire to occur in your home and what you can do, or have already done, to either remove or reduce the risk.

Some of the most common causes of fires in homes are:

- smokers' material, such as cigarettes, matches and lighters
- naked flames, such as candles and tea lights
- portable heaters
- open fires
- electrical equipment

Smokers' material: such as cigarettes, matches and lighters

In line with legislative requirements around [smoke-free premises in Wales](#), it is a requirement as part of your CIW registration that smoking is not permitted in the presence of children being looked after or on premises in which day care is provided.

Cigarettes, lighters and matches must always be kept out of sight, out of reach and preferably in a secure cabinet away from children. Smoking materials hold a fascination for most children who may wish to imitate adults or play with cigarettes, lighters or matches.

Remember: keep things that can cause fires out of children's reach.

Naked flames: such as candles and tea lights

Candles and or tea lights should not be used when childminding is taking place; the only exception is for small candles on birthday cakes.

Portable heaters

Portable heaters other than electrical oil-filled radiators are not safe forms of heating for child minding activities and they should only be used in exceptional circumstances, such as heating system failures. On such occasions, the heater should be securely anchored in a safe and suitable position, enclosed within a childproof fireguard, away from combustible materials and should not be situated in escape routes.

Open fires

A substantial childproof fireguard should be securely fixed in position in front of open fires and any heater where the surface temperature could injure a child coming into contact with it (such as a wood-burning stove). No part of the guard should be closer than 200mm from the heat source, otherwise the guard may get dangerously hot.

Electrical equipment

It is recommended that a 10 yearly periodic inspection of the electrical wiring within your home is conducted by a qualified electrician to check the condition of the electrics in your home against the UK standard for the safety of electrical installations.

- There should be no obvious defect in the electrical wiring system.
- Sockets and switches should be securely fixed to the wall.
- Sockets should not be overloaded with plugs. If you do that then heat can build up in the electrical circuitry, which can easily start a serious fire. So only use one plug per socket where possible.
- Avoid using multiple socket extension leads if possible. However, if there is no alternative, take care that they are not overloaded and keep cables out of sight and reach of children. You should not use multi-plug adaptors (which allow more than one appliance to be plugged directly into the same wall

socket) at all.

- Where multiple socket extension leads are used, the maximum current rating should not be exceeded. For a four-socket extension lead with a 13 amp fuse, that means using only small devices like lights or phone chargers drawing no more than 3 amps each. Appliances that generate heat, like irons and kettles, draw much more than 3 amps, as do most large appliances like washing machines; they should never be plugged into extension leads with anything else.
- Electrical sockets in any rooms that the children have access to should be of the shuttered type, to prevent children poking anything, including fingers, into sockets. Note that shuttered sockets should be fitted as standard in most homes. Only if your home and its electrical installation is very old is that unlikely to be the case, and if so you can fit cheap safety covers instead. If you are in any doubt, though, you should consult a qualified electrician.
- Make sure electrical appliances such as TVs and computers in children's bedrooms are switched off at night.
- Electrical appliances should not have any loose or damaged cords or plugs.
- Electrical cabling should not be run under carpets or heavy furniture.
- If you need to replace the plug or fuse on an appliance, always use a fuse with the right rating:
 1. items that do not generate heat for example table lamps, radios, televisions, computers and most fridges and freezers) 3 amp fuse (red)
 2. all other appliances, especially those which generate heat 13 amp fuse (brown)

More information on how to calculate the maximum current rating for multiple adapters extension sockets and other electrical fire safety advice is [available](#).

Regular visual inspections should be carried out to look for signs of damage, for example:

- a smell of hot plastic or burning near an appliance or socket
- sparks or smoke coming from a plug or appliance
- blackness or scorch marks around a socket or plug, or on an appliance
- damaged or frayed leads
- coloured wire inside leads showing at the plug or anywhere else

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- melted plastic on appliance casings or leads
- fuses that blow or circuit-breakers that operate for no obvious reason

Fire alarm

A fire alarm system, for example smoke and heat alarms, give an early warning of fire and should always be installed and working in places used for childminding. Smoke and heat alarms will ensure that you are made aware of a developing fire in your home at the earliest opportunity and allow you to leave/evacuate your home safely. The number and location of smoke and/or heat alarms you will need will depend on the size and layout of your home and on whether or not you provide overnight sleeping accommodation.

It is highly recommended that all childminding properties should be fitted with a mains-powered fire alarm system with a standby power supply (a battery inside each of the alarms) in case of a mains power failure (power cut).

Smoke alarm or heat alarm: what is the difference?

Smoke alarms go off when they detect smoke but they can be quite sensitive to cooking fumes and steam too. So they should be fitted in all rooms where a fire might start with the exception of smoky or steamy rooms like your kitchen.

Heat alarms only go off when the temperature within a room reaches a certain level caused by a fire. Heat alarms are more suitable for kitchens as they will not be set off by cooking fumes, therefore reducing false alarms.

Both type of alarms are just as easy to fit.

Testing

You should test all smoke and or heat alarms each week by using the test button provided on each alarm. Every six months you should clean each smoke and or

heat alarms by gently using the vacuum cleaner hose to clean away dust. As part of the weekly test you should make sure that the alarm can be heard clearly throughout your home with all doors closed, paying special attention to bedrooms if you provide overnight care.

- Smoke alarms need to be installed in escape routes, usually the hall and stairs as a minimum. You may also want to fit them in the rooms where childminding takes place or where a fire may start for example where electrical appliances are left plugged in.
- If overnight sleeping accommodation is to take place, you should also fit smoke alarms in the rooms used for sleeping. Children generally sleep more deeply than adults, and may well not be woken by a smoke alarm outside the door.
- In a house that has more than one storey where children are looked after, there should be at least one smoke alarm at each storey.
- Do not put smoke alarms in or very close to the kitchen. Instead, fit heat alarms within the kitchen.
- If you have more than one alarm, you should consider connecting them together so that they all operate their warning signal if any one alarm operates. (Any electrician can do this).
- If you live in a rented property, you will probably have smoke alarms fitted already. You should talk to your landlord about testing these alarms.

Summary

Fire can be a serious risk to the life and health of the children in your care, and to you and your family, but by taking the simple steps in this guide you can keep that risk to a minimum. That should usually only involve understanding the risks of fire in your home and, if necessary, making plans and changing your daily routine accordingly. Only in very rare circumstances would you have to make physical alterations to your home, because all houses have long been built to robust fire safety standards. Nor do you need to install firefighting equipment such as a fire blanket or fire extinguisher. This is because you should never attempt to fight a fire yourself. Instead, if there is a fire, get everyone out of the house in line with your escape plan, call 999 and ask for the fire brigade.

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If you need any further help or advice on fire safety, then your local Fire and Rescue Service will be happy to provide this free of charge. The Service cannot, though, complete the fire risk assessment for you.

Further information and contacts

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service

- Bridgend
- Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Merthyr Tydfil
- Cardiff
- the Vale of Glamorgan
- Caerphilly
- Blaenau Gwent
- Torfaen
- Newport
- Monmouthshire

Telephone: 01443 232000

Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service

- Powys
- Ceredigion
- Pembrokeshire
- Carmarthenshire
- Swansea
- Neath Port Talbot

Telephone: 0370 6060699

North Wales Fire and Rescue Service

- Anglesey
- Gwynedd

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- Wrexham

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