



Ratio and Group Size Standards for Licensed Child Care

Fact Sheet | November 2016

Staff-to-child ratios, group sizes, and age distributions for child care centers and family child care settings are critical standards that ensure a minimum level of safety, supervision, and quality in child care. The standards vary based on setting, the age of children in care, and the concentration of children from each age group. These standards are set forth by Minnesota law. [Minnesota Rules, chapter 9503](#) (“Rule 3”) defines the standards for child care centers, and [Minnesota Rules, chapter 9502](#) (“Rule 2”) governs family child care and group family child care.

Categorizing the Age of Children

Minnesota Rules define various age categories for children in care. These definitions inform the staff-to-child ratios and group size standards.

| Child Care Center Age Categories* | |
|--|---------------------------|
| Newborn | Not defined |
| Infant | 6 weeks to 16 months |
| Toddler | 16 to 33 months |
| Preschooler | 33 months to kindergarten |
| School-age child | Kindergarten to 12 years |
| *As defined by Minnesota Rules, chapter 9503 | |

| Family Child Care Age Categories* | |
|---|----------------------|
| Newborn | Less than 6 weeks |
| Infant | 6 weeks to 12 months |
| Toddler | 12 to 24 months |
| Preschooler | 24 months to 5 years |
| School-age child | 5 to 11 years |
| *As defined by Minnesota Statutes, chapter 245A | |

Defining Staff-to-Child Ratios and Group Sizes

Staff-to-child ratios provide a minimum standard needed to supervise and care for children. To maintain quality and safety, group size standards (defined by capacity in family child care settings) limit the total number of children, based on age, who can be cared for in a given setting. Together ratios and group sizes inform how many children an individual can care for and how many total children in care are allowed.

Child Care Centers

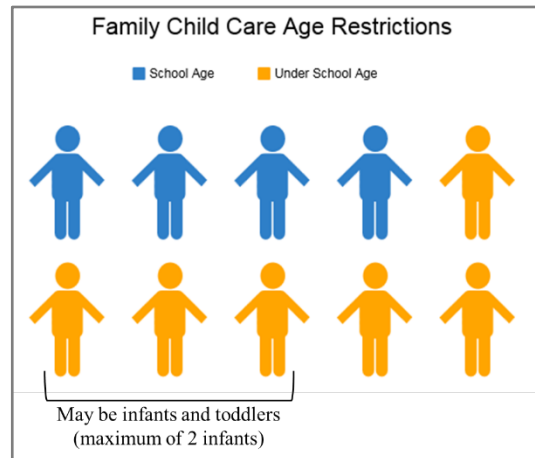
Ratio and group size standards apply at all times except during certain activities like meals, outdoor activities, field trips, and naps. Additionally, children of different ages may be grouped together during drop-off and pick-up times when it often makes sense to condense classrooms. However, ratio and group size requirements for the age category of the youngest child in care must be followed.

| Child Care Center Ratios and Group Sizes, by Age Category | | |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Age Category | Minimum Staff-to-Child Ratio | Maximum Group Size |
| Infant | 1:4 | 8 |
| Toddler | 1:7 | 14 |
| Preschooler | 1:10 | 20 |
| School-age child | 1:15 | 30 |

Family Child Care

Minnesota Rules, chapter 9502, recognizes the increased effort needed to care for infants and toddlers. The ratio and age distribution standards for family child care places limits on the number of infants and toddlers that can be cared for depending on the overall mix of children in care. Of the total number of children allowed in care, there are limits on the number of under school-age children and the number of infants and toddlers. The figure, right, illustrates the age distribution restrictions in place for a class A family child care setting.

The table below indicates the capacity, ratio and age restriction standards outlined in Minnesota Rules, chapter 9502.



In family child care, of the non-school-age children, 3 may be infants and toddlers with a maximum of 2 infants.

Family Child Care Ratios and Group Sizes

| Setting | Class | Capacity | Adults | Children Under School-Age | Infant and Toddler Restrictions |
|--|-------|----------|--------|---------------------------|--|
| Family Child Care | A | 10 | 1 | 6 | Of the under school-age children, 3 may be infants and toddlers with a maximum of 2 infants. |
| Specialized Infant and Toddler Family Child Care | B1 | 5 | 1 | 3 | Maximum of 3 infants |
| | B2 | 6 | 1 | 4 | Maximum of 2 infants |
| Group Family Child Care | C1 | 10 | 1 | 8 | Of the under school-age children, 3 may be infants and toddlers with a maximum of 2 infants. |
| | C2 | 12 | 1 | 10 | Of the under school-age children, 2 may be infants and toddlers with a maximum of 1 infant. |
| | C3 | 14 | 2 | 10 | Of the under school-age children, 4 may be infants and toddlers with a maximum of 3 infants. |
| Specialized Infant and Toddler Group Family Child Care | D | 9 | 2 | 7 | Maximum of 4 infants |