

REFERENCE GUIDE FOR GROUP SIZES

What Is Group Size?

Regulations and quality standards define group size in various ways. The following definition borrows from a number of sources, including the National Health and Safety Performance Standards in Caring for Our Children (NHSPS, 2002, Standard 1.002):

A specific number of children, distinct from the larger population of children, who are together regularly and interact with each other, and with one or more specific staff members, in an assigned space.

Montana child care centers are subject to group size requirements as follows:

newborn through 23 months - maximum group size **12**
ages 2-3 - maximum group size **16**
age 4 - maximum group size **24**
age 5 and over - maximum group size **32**

Group sizes will be determined by the following indicators:

- **Program activity schedules;**
- **Assigned spaces;** and
- **Teaching staff assignments.**

Existing facilities who do not currently meet group size requirements will have until **August 31, 2018** to submit their transition plans to their licensor.

1. **Program activity schedules:** the program's typical daily schedule should not exceed required group sizes more than 4 hours per day including:
 - Outdoor Play; and
 - Large group activities.

Does not include rest time and meal time.

Does not include field trips and other "non-typical" days.

See example schedule on page 3.

How many hours a day are group sizes maintained? Is this reflected in the activity schedules?

2. **Assigned space:** Each group must occupy an assigned space. There must be a visual separation either through physical boundaries or the set-up of the play centers and other items.

To get maximum benefit from organizing children in small groups, each group should have its own room.

When a room for each group is not possible, the space should be organized so that one group is not distracted by the activities of the other groups. You can define the limits of each group's assigned space with firmly anchored room dividers or items such as counters or shelves that will not tip over.

When such barriers are not available, space for children old enough to understand can be defined using familiar objects, colors, special carpets, or other means to distinguish specific group areas within the room. Boundaries should be age appropriate so that teachers are not continually having to remind children to stay within the assigned space.

When defining space for infants and children under 2, you need to ensure that they are safe from environmental hazards and away from the activities of older children. There must be physical barriers to divide the space such as counters or shelves that will not tip over.

Do individual groups occupy assigned spaces? Are the spaces defined well enough that the children in the age group know where they belong?

- 3. Teaching staff assignments:** Each group must have an assigned teacher or teachers. Facilities must ensure that at least one staff member is responsible for each child and has an opportunity to get to know each child. Children must be able to interact regularly with a limited number of caregivers.

Do teachers always know which group they are assigned to? Do children know who their teachers are?

Conclusion: You may find that your facility already meets group size requirements based on the interpretation in this guide. Or you may find that with some minor adjustments, you can meet the requirement within the next few months. Licensors should be able to monitor through reviewing schedules or discussions with staff and directors as well as observing the set-up of the assigned spaces.

If you do not think your facility will be in compliance with group size requirements by **August 31, 2018** you must **submit a transition plan**. Transition plans should include the above indicators and estimated completion dates.

ARM 37.95.623 CHILD CARE CENTERS: RATIOS AND GROUP SIZES

- (1) *The child-to-staff ratio and maximum group size for a child care center are:*
 - (a) *4:1 for children newborn through 23 months with a maximum group size of 12;*
 - (b) *8:1 for children two years through three years with a maximum group size of 16;*
 - (c) *10:1 for children four years with a maximum group size of 24; and*

(d) 14:1 for five years and over with a maximum group size of 32.

(2) When children of different ages are mixed, the ratio and group size for the youngest child in the group must be maintained.

(3) Only the director, early childhood lead teachers, assistant teachers, trainees, and substitute teachers may be counted as staff when determining the staff ratio.

(4) Group sizes must be maintained except for mealtimes, outdoor play, rest periods, or during large group activities, such as educational assemblies.

Example:

7:00 - 7:30 Breakfast (combined groups)

7:30 – 8:30 large group activity (combined groups) 1 hour

8:30 – 10:00 individual groups

10:00 – 10:15 snack time (combined groups)

10:15 – 11:00 outdoor play (combined groups) 45 minutes

11:00 – 11:30 individual groups

11:30 – 12:00 lunch (combined groups)

12:00 – 12:30 story time (combined groups) 30 minutes

12:30 – 2:00 rest time (combined groups)

2:00 – 2:15 snack time (combined groups)

2:15 – 3:00 outdoor play (combined groups) 45 minutes

3:00 – 4:30 individual groups

4:30 – 5:30 large group activity (combined groups) 1 hour

Total hours of combined group time not including meals and rest is 4 hours so this type of schedule would be allowed.