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**HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT CHILDCARE FACILITY IF YOUR CHILD HAS ASTHMA OR ALLERGIES**

\* **Choosing the right childcare facility is a challenge** for all parents. Every parent wants a safe facility with qualified instructors where their child can feel welcome and will thrive. Cost and convenience are also considerations. When your child has allergies or asthma, there are more factors to consider in choosing the right facility.

\* If possible, parents or caregivers should always visit the facility, interview the director and spend some time in the facility observing normal day care practices before making a decision. AAFA-TX recommends **some things you might consider in making your selection if your child has asthma or allergies.**

\* **Location:** If your child has pollen, grass, tree or weed allergies, a facility located near fields or a wooded area isn't the best choice for your child. Facilities located near busy highways or in urban areas where children are exposed to highway exhausts and other road pollutants may not be the best choice for a child sensitive to chemical irritants.

\* **Disease Education:** Have the teachers and director had any training about asthma and allergies? Can they identify early symptoms of an asthma flare-up, allergic reaction or a food allergy reaction that might lead to anaphylaxis? Do they know what to do in case of an emergency like an asthma flare-up or anaphylaxis? Do they know how to administer medications? Does every affected child have a written asthma action plan on file, one that lists all known allergens or irritants, medications and their dose and usage, emergency contact information? (Ask AAFA-TX for a free copy of an Asthma/Allergy Action Plan).

\* **Are environmental allergens kept to a minimum or eliminated at the facility? 1) If your child is allergic to dust mites** look for facilities with tile or wood floors that use area rugs that are washed regularly and window coverings like washable blinds. Are the sleep mats, blankets or toys washed weekly in hot water to kill dust mites? Is the furniture dusted weekly? Is there a lot of upholstered furniture that can collect dust mites? Are books, magazines and toys stored in enclosed bookcases, closed boxes or plastic bags to reduce dust? Are teaching materials and supplies stored in cabinets to reduce dust? **2) Animal dander and droppings** are some of the most potent allergens. Furry or feathered pets shouldn't be allowed anywhere on the premises. **Cockroach droppings are a potent allergen**, too. Are food containers kept tightly sealed? Are garbage cans tightly covered? **3) Mold and mildew** cause havoc for many with allergies and asthma. Are there working exhaust fans in the kitchen area and bathrooms? Does the facility feel humid? Are there signs of visible mold in the kitchen or bathroom areas? If there is carpeting in the facility are the sleep mats vinyl? Are they cleaned weekly with a 10 to 1 bleach/water solution to kill mold? Are there indoor plants which might harbor mold? **4) To avoid outdoor pollen allergens**, is the ventilation good enough so windows don't have to be open during high pollen months? Are the air conditioning filters cleaned regularly? Are the outside areas around the building kept free of compost piles, fallen leaves or cut grass? **5) Tobacco smoke** can trigger asthma flare-ups as well as cause ear or respiratory infections. **No one should be allowed to smoke in or on school property** or in the vans or buses used to transport the children. **6) Chemical irritants are a major contributor to asthma flare-ups and allergy symptoms.** Staff shouldn't wear perfumes or scented personal products while working with the children. No air fragrance sprays or products should be used. Cleaning supplies and pesticides should never be used when the children are present and the facility should be thoroughly ventilated during and after they are used. New furniture, whether wood or plastic laminated, should be aired out before use; most of these furniture products contain formaldehyde, a strong irritant. Office equipment like copiers shouldn't be used near the childcare areas; these also emit chemical irritants.

\* If your child has **food allergies**, what arrangements are made to protect the children from cross-contamination? Are food treats for birthdays and other celebrations discouraged to prevent accidental exposure to allergic foods? Is it part of the school policy to have children and staff wash hands thoroughly both *before and after* eating? Are food tables cleaned thoroughly with soap and water after each use? Does the school use food products for craft projects? Does the school have **a plan for anaphylaxis incidents**? Does all staff know how to use epinephrine devices in case of anaphylaxis? (Ask AAFA-TX for a free copy of school procedures for anaphylaxis).

\* If you choose to place your child in a family day care, you'll need to consider all the above guidelines as well as consider that family members in that household may have an impact on a healthy environment for your asthmatic or allergic child. Perhaps a family member will smoke in the house, or they may have pets, or have hobbies that use chemical products that produce strong odors or fumes. **Be an informed advocate for your child.** Check it out before you make a choice. If the school hasn't had disease training, recommend they ask AAFA-TX about our continuing education program on asthma and allergy essentials.

**Upcoming Free AAFA-TX Programs** 1) **Asthma Camps within Texas:** June 19-22, San Angelo; July 8-13, Houston; Aug. 5-10, Dallas. **4) June 20** – "Tools To Manage Asthma & Allergies" a Worksite Wellness Program, Blockbuster Corporate, Dallas, Dr. Eric Schmitt, presenting. **5) June 27** – "Tools To Manage Asthma & Allergies" a Worksite Wellness Program, Blockbuster Corporate, McKinney, Dr. John Meiser, presenting. For more information, contact AAFA-TX

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