



Discussion video

**Regulation change for ratios, group size, and  
space per child**

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For a full explanation see the



[video with Dr Mike Bedford, Rick Fourie and Helen van der Merve](#)



# Why we need to improve the regulations

- ✓ Qualified teachers
- ✓ World class curriculum guidelines
- × Very poor teacher:child ratios
- × Serious overcrowding indoors
- × Inadequate outdoor space
- × No group size limits
- × No effective protection against noise
- × No effective protection against air pollution (centre location issues)

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# Regulating ratios and group size

Ratios and group size are absolutely interconnected, and both have primarily to do with relationships. If ratios are reduced to the point where supervision is the main function, then quality of education and care will be very low.

Ratios alone cannot ensure that all children are in secure relationships with adults through the day. Large group sizes increase relationship complexity beyond a point that is manageable, and may see some children lost in the crowd.

The primary purpose of regulations for ratios and group size is child protection. Quality of care and education cannot be ensured simply by regulation; they are factors in a complex mix involving pedagogical practice and environmental design.

Regulations need to allow for less than ideal conditions due to fluctuations in children's enrolments, and the need to balance [group size](#) with [teaching team size](#).

# Ratios and group size – Childcare.gov

<b>Your child's age</b>	<b>No more than this number of children per trained adult (child-to-adult ratio)</b>	<b>Maximum number of children in each group or class (group size)</b>	<b>Total number of adults in a full group or class</b>
Infant (younger than 12 months)	1 trained adult should not care for more than 3–4 infants	No more than 6–8 infants together in a group	2 trained adults should always be present in a full group of 6–8 infants
Young toddler (1–2 years)	1 trained adult should not care for more than 3–6 young toddlers	No more than 6–12 young toddlers in a group or classroom	2 trained adults should always be present in a full group of 6–12 young toddlers
Older toddler (2–3 years)	1 trained adult should not care for more than 4–6 older toddlers	No more than 8–12 older toddlers in a group or classroom	2 trained adults should always be present in a full group of 8–12 older toddlers
Preschooler (3–5 years)	1 trained adult should not care for more than 6–10 preschoolers	No more than 12–20 preschoolers in a group or classroom	2 trained adults should always be present in a full group of 12–20 preschoolers
School age	1 trained adult should not care for more than 10–12 school-age children	No more than 20–24 school-age children in a group or classroom	2 trained adults should always be present in a full group of 20–24 school-age children

ChildCare.gov is operated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care (OCC).

# Group size

Group size and staff-child ratio. In European countries there is a wide range in the group size of childcare facilities. For the 0-3-year olds the size ranges from 10 to 14 children.

For the older age group the size varies from 20 children, for example, in Austria or the Slovak Republic, to 30 children in France.

In Poland, the maximum group size is not yet regulated.

CESifo DICE Report 1/2010. <https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/dicereport110-db5.pdf>

DICE Report is a quarterly journal featuring articles on institutional regulations and economic policy measures that offer country comparative analyses.

# Ratios and group size – international examples

Jurisdiction	Up to months									Bands	Overlap?	Group size?
	1.5	12	15	18	24	30	36	48	60			
<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>1:5</b>				<b>1:10</b>					<b>2</b>		<b>No</b>
New York State	1:3	1:4			1:5			1:7	1:8	5		Yes (2-3x)
Indiana		1:4	1:5				1:7	1:10	1:12	5		Yes (2x)
Oklahoma	1:4		1:6			1:6	1:8		1:15	4		Yes (2x)
Isle of Man	1:2 upstairs / 1:3 <sup>a</sup>					1:8				2		Yes (<2s, 12)
Minnesota	1:4		1:7			1:7		1:10		3		Yes (2x)
Arkansas	1:5				1:8	1:8		1:15		4	Yes	Yes (2x)
Newfoundland and Labrador	1:3				1:5			1:8		3	Yes	No
Arizona	1:5 / 2:11		1:6 / 2:13			1:8		1:13	1:15	5		No
Kansas	1:3		1:5			1:5	1:7		1:12	5+	Yes	Yes (2x)
					1:10							
Pennsylvania	1:4		1:5			1:6		1:10		4		Yes 2x
Michigan	1:4					1:8	1:10	1:12		4		Yes <3s
Tennessee	Under 15 months 1:4			Complex overlapping age bands (11 in total)						11	Yes	Yes 2x
Colorado	1:5				1:7		1:10	1:12		5	Yes	Yes 2x
					1:8							
British Columbia	1:3					1:3		1:8		2	Yes	Yes
Finland	1:4					1:4				2		No
Denmark	1:3					1:6						No
England	1:3					1:4		1:8 / 1:13 <sup>b</sup>		3		No
Wales	1:3					1:4		1:8		3		Yes
Northern Territories	1:4					1:5		1:11		3		No
Queensland	1:4					1:5		1:11		3		No
NSW	1:4					1:5		1:10		3		No
Victoria	1:4					1:4		1:11		3		No
ACT	1:4					1:5		1:11		3		No
South Australia	1:4					1:5		1:11		3		No
Tasmania	1:4					1:5		1:10 / 2:25 <sup>c</sup>		3		No

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/educator-to-child-ratios>

<sup>a</sup> 1:2 children under 2 years who are cared for above ground floor level. 1:3 children under 2 years. 1:8 children aged 2-7 year

<sup>b</sup> 1:8 unqualified, 1:13 if qualified teacher led.

<sup>c</sup> 2:25 for a 'preschool programme'

# Group size – purpose

Group size limitation is primarily about relationships.

Group size limits have the purpose of:

1. Limiting the social interaction complexity imposed on a child for most of the attendance time, and is associated with belonging.
2. Limiting the number of children a teacher needs to build relationships with to ensure that those relationship can be maintained, with suitable attention to individual child needs and development.
3. Ensuring that all children have secure relationships with adults during the day.

# Group size – definitions

‘Group size’ means the numbers of children in a spatially separated group, with specifically allocated teachers (counted in ratio), applied for 80% of the operational day.

‘Spatially separated’ means separated from other *groups* by being in separate rooms, where a ‘room’ is a space divided from other spaces by a barrier at least 1.5m high.

- Group size does not apply outside.
- Group size doesn’t mean room size or centre size.

## Ratios and group sizes proposed 3 years after legislation passed

### Age grouped

The limits are set for the youngest child in the group

Teacher led, long day (max 11 hrs)			
Age range	Minimum teacher:child ratio	Max Group size	Group size to ratio
Under 18 months	1:3	9	3x
18 to 30 months	1:4	12	3x
24 to 36 months	1:6	18	3x
3 years and over	1:8	32	4x

Teacher led, school day (max 7 hrs)			
Age range	Minimum teacher:child ratio	Max Group size	Group size to ratio
Under 18 months	1:3	9	3x
18 to 30 months	1:4	12	3x
24 to 36 months	1:6	18	3x
30 to 36 months	1:7	35	5x
3 years and over	1:8	40	5x

Sessional and school age are set to match traditional sessional and current 6-7 hour kindergarten environments, but there is a reduction in capacity if children are enrolled at under three years old.

There is recognition here that many kindergartens do not have the ability to split groups.

It's not good to see children in childcare for 11 hours a day, but there can be adverse consequences for children by making a 10 hour limit. It may mean that children are in commercially zoned child care with a long drive rather than a better quality centre closer to home.

## Ratios and group sizes proposed 3 years after legislation passed

### Age grouped – sessional

The limits are set for the youngest child in the group

Teacher led, sessional (max 4 hrs)			
Age range	Minimum teacher:child ratio	Max Group size	Group size to ratio
Under 12 months	1:3	9	3x
12 to 30 months	1:4	12	3x
24 to 36 months	1:6	24	4x
30 to 36 months	1:10	40	4x
3 years and over	1:15	45	3x

## Ratios and group sizes proposed 3 years after legislation passed

### Mixed age

Teacher led, mixed age, all ages			
Total number of children	Max under 12 months	Max <u>all</u> children under 30 months	Minimum teachers
Up to 10	1	5	2
11-15	2	7	3
15-20	3	10	4
21-25	4	12	5

Teacher led, mixed age, over 1 year		
Total number of children	Max children 12 to 30 months	Minimum teachers
Up to 12	6	2
13-18	9	3
19-24	12	4
25-30	15	5

This model lends itself very well to village-type centre designs, e.g. 5 x 25 child 'houses', for a total centre size of 125, while maintaining small groups and community.

These tables are for environments that do not have age groupings.

Practical considerations include:

- The extra attention demands from very young children
- The need to allow flexibility of ages for enrolment demand variations
- The need for enough teachers to cover various needs and activities, indoors and outdoors

It's important to stress that these are group size limits not centre size limits, so for example, a fully mixed age centre with babies could have a group of 20 children with four teachers, and a group of 25 children with five teachers, for a total of 45 children. Numbers are 'in ratio', so a team would be supplemented with an extra teacher, possibly shared across two groups, depending on group size.

# Ratios and group size transition

Age range with age division	Minimum Ratio	Max Group Size
Immediate		
Under 2 years	1:4	12
Over 2 years	1:10	40
After 18 months		
Under 2 years	1:4	12
2-3 years	1:7	21
Over 3 years	1:10	40

We can't get there in one go .

The priority for immediate improvements goes to getting rid of the one to five ratio for under 2s, and starting to put in place group size limits.

There are a number of teachers who specialise in the under two age group. if we can shift to a compulsory max 1:4 under 2s, and limit the group size for this age to 12, there is a potential to bring teachers back and stabilise the under 2's workforce which is where the most damage is being done.

The next priority after two years (because of the need to have more teachers trained), is to reduce the ratio for the toddlers, with an accompanying group size reduction.

# Indoor space

Jurisdiction	Age or needs group	m <sup>2</sup>	NZ equivalent m <sup>2</sup> by description
Montana	Special needs	5.00	5.50
Illinois	Play and sleep	5.11	4.60
Michigan	Infants & toddlers	4.65	4.18
Denver	Infants	4.65	4.18
Republic of Ireland	0-1 year	3.5	3.85
Isle of Man	Under two years	3.7	3.70
Saskatchewan		3.70	3.70
Vermont		3.25	3.58
<b>Australian National Regulations</b>		3.25	3.58
British Columbia		3.70	3.52
Minnesota		3.25	3.41
Oklahoma	Infants	3.72	3.34
Pennsylvania		3.72	3.34
Newfoundland and Labrador		3.30	3.30
<b>11 US States</b>	Includes Arizona <1 year	3.25	3.25
Republic of Ireland	1-2 years	2.8	3.08
Ontario		2.80	3.08
Texas		2.79	3.07
Manitoba		3.30	2.97
<b>7 US States</b>		3.25	2.93
United Kingdom	0-2 years	3.5	2.8
Denver	Other than infants	2.79	2.79
<b>New Zealand pre-2008</b>		<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.75</b>
Alabama		2.97	2.68
Republic of Ireland	2-3 years	2.36	2.6
Republic of Ireland	3-6 years	2.3	2.53
Tennessee		2.79	2.51
<b>New Zealand</b>			<b>2.50</b>
Arizona	Over 1 year	2.32	2.32
Isle of Man	Over 2 years	2.3	2.3
Illinois	Infants	2.32	2.09
United Kingdom	2-3 years	2.5	2
United Kingdom	Over 3 years	2.3	1.84

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# Indoor space

## Existing centre transition time from passing legislation (with funding):

After 6 months: 2.75 m<sup>2</sup>

Again we can't get there in one go.

After 18 months: 3.0 m<sup>2</sup>

Indoor space increases after six months to return it in affect to the 2008 level, and then in two increments to match the Australian standard (after wording matching).

After 3 years: 3.5 m<sup>2</sup>

We can't shift new centres too far at once or there will be potentially damaging discrepancy between new centres and existing ones.

## New centres (with funding):

Immediate: 3.0 m<sup>2</sup>

After 3 years: 3.5 m<sup>2</sup>

# Outdoor space

## Existing centres (with funding):

After 6 months: 5.5 m<sup>2</sup>

After 18 months: 6 m<sup>2</sup>

After 3 years: 7.0 m<sup>2</sup>

## New centres (with funding):

Immediate: 10 m<sup>2</sup>

Outdoor space increments match the indoor space increments, so that the changes are not out of step, and are matched to proportional increases in funding.

For new centres we don't ever want to see centres developed with small outdoor areas again, so we want to ensure that the land area is big enough and not over developed.

For comparison, traditional kindergarten and Playcentre outdoor areas are normally 15m<sup>2</sup> to 25m<sup>2</sup> per child.

Email feedback to Mike Bedford

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