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EDITOR'S NOTE: Information for this story was gathered online and from the Americans with Disabilities Act Web site, www.ada.gov. Future stories will deal with other frequently asked questions providers have about the connection between child care centers and the ADA.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is a wide-ranging civil rights law that prohibits, under certain circumstances, discrimination based on disability.

It affords similar protections against discrimination to Americans with disabilities as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made discrimination based on race, religion, sex, national origin and other characteristics illegal.

Under Title III of the ADA, no individual may be discriminated against on the basis of disability with regards to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation by any person who owns, leases (or leases to), or operates a place of public accommodation.

Day-care centers and other child care facilities are among the places covered under the ADA, with particular attention to Title III, and many prospective providers have many questions about how the act pertains to child care.

The Web site, www.ada.gov, provides some of those answers, including what the act covers. Here are some of the answers to those questions.

Q: Does the Americans with Disabilities Act apply to child care centers?

A: Yes. Privately-run child care centers – like other public accommodations such as private schools, recreation centers, restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, and banks – must comply with Title III of the ADA. Child care services provided by government agencies, such as Head Start, summer programs, and extended school day programs, must comply with Title II of the ADA. Both titles apply to a child care center's interactions with the children, parents, guardians, and potential customers that it serves.

A child care center's employment practices are covered by other parts of the ADA and are not addressed here. For more information about the ADA and employment practices, please call the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Q: Which child care centers are covered by Title III?

A: Almost all child care providers, regardless of size or number of employees, must comply with Title III of the ADA. Even small, home-based centers that may not have to follow some State laws are covered by Title III.

The exception is child care centers that are actually run by religious entities such as churches, mosques, or synagogues. Activities controlled by religious organizations are not covered by Title III.

Private child care centers that are operating on the premises of a religious organization, however, are generally not exempt from Title III. Where such areas are leased by a child care program not controlled or operated by the religious organization, Title III applies to the child care program but not the religious organization. For example, if a private child care program is operated out of a church, pays rent to the church, and has no other connection to the church, the program has to comply with Title III, but the church does not.