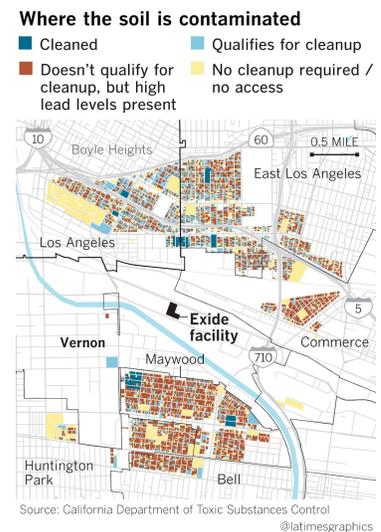


The Flores Family Child Care Facility

The home-based Flores Family Child Care facility opened its doors in 2016. Justine Flores, the program director and her staff care for 14 children at a time who range in age from infants to 13 years old. The facility is in East Los Angeles and received its Eco-Healthy Child Care® (EHCC) endorsement in 2019.

Due to the poor health of the children she was serving, Ms. Flores was prompted to work towards attaining the EHCC endorsement to ensure a safer and more environmentally healthy child care environment. Between 2017 and 2019, Flores and other employees began to take notice of how the majority of children in their care were disabled and frequently ill. In May 2019, a [University of Southern California study](#) found significantly elevated levels of lead in the teeth of children living in five L.A. neighborhoods including Flores's. Exide Technologies recycling plant and its predecessors emitted lead, arsenic, and other dangerous pollutants. These harmful emissions have left homes, apartments, schools, parks and child care facilities in the local area with dangerously high levels of lead contaminated soil. This 2018 [graphic](#) shows how extensively lead spread throughout the area. After having the lead (a known neurotoxicant) removed from her facility's grounds, she came across the EHCC checklist while trying to educate herself about other toxic substances commonly found in child care spaces.



Flores was able to prioritize the environmental health of the children she cared for because the checklist's practices were affordable and easy to implement. She removed or swapped out anything that could negatively affect the indoor air quality. Flores formerly had wall-to-wall carpeting - which can expose young children to Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) as well as trap moisture, dust and dirt, thus negatively impacting the indoor air quality. The child care facility replaced the wall-to-wall carpeting with tile flooring and area rugs; the floors are now easier to clean and more environmentally healthy.

Flores makes sure that the facility maintains adequate ventilation by using exhaust fans and by opening screened windows whenever the weather allows. Additionally, all water leaks are repaired as quickly as possible and the humidity is kept with a desirable range of 30 to 50% and monitored on a biweekly basis. The humidity readings are conveniently displayed on the screen of the facility's thermostat which is located by the one story building's front door. Since not all thermostats give humidity readings, purchasing an inexpensive humidity sensor, or a hydrometer, is an easy way to monitor humidity levels. Flores' concern extended beyond the inside walls of Flores Family Child Care; now vehicles are prohibited from idling in the designated parking area as well as in pick-up and drop-off locations. According to the [US Department of Energy](#), cutting vehicle idling time reduces emissions of carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, and other harmful pollutants.

Flores also referred to the EHCC checklist and fact sheets when she replaced the children's furniture and toys and when repainting the facility's walls. The kids now spend their days in rooms painted with low volatile organic compound (VOC) paint. Children are particularly susceptible to VOC health effects such as allergies as well as neurological and developmental problems. Flores cited EHCC's educational materials as valuable tools because they cover a range of topics, contain a lot of detail, and are straightforward.

Initially, and with good intention, Flores installed artificial grass in the facility's large backyard in order to allow the children to play outside. Only after installing the artificial turf did she learn that it is unsafe. [Artificial turf](#) is made of plastic blades of grass, plastic backing material to hold the blades, and infill (usually crumb rubber that helps support the blades). Playing on these surfaces can unnecessarily expose children to toxic chemicals and heavy metals. This did not discourage Flores - she promptly ripped the artificial turf out and invested in mulch instead. Mulch is an excellent way to cover any bare soil in and around child care facilities. Bare soil can be contaminated with harmful lead or other harmful metals; the dust and dirt can get onto children's hands and they can end up ingesting it.



Flores believes that the EHCC checklist helped her family's facility evolve into a more nurturing and healthy environment where children can grow by fully and safely exploring the curiosities around them.

With respect to COVID-19, Flores Family Child Care is doing its part to stop the spread by making and giving away masks, hosting free food drives, and donating diapers to families in their community. Ms. Flores urges home-based and center-based providers across the country to assess their sites for toxic materials and substances. The COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity for providers to educate themselves about other hazardous elements while also learning how to protect children and staff from contracting the illness.