

COVID-19 policies create child-care crunch for essential workers ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Despite the global COVID-19 pandemic, babies are still being born and Toronto labour room nurse Marianne Ryan, 38, is needed at work. But her daycare is closed and she is scrambling to find appropriate care for her sons, aged eight and 10.

"My kids are being watched by my parents who are over age 65 and at risk of the virus," Ryan said Monday. "And they have to come on the TTC to watch my kids which is also a risk."

To make matters worse, Ryan's stepmother also cares for her own ailing parents who are in their 90s, and that's a concern too, she added.

Ontario's chief medical officer of health Monday recommended all child-care programs in the province suspend operations as a precaution, a move many parents, early childhood educators and daycare operators welcomed to help slow the spread of the virus.

The decision follows all provinces except British Columbia and Manitoba, which have closed or are planning to close child-care programs along with public schools.

But Ontario still falls short of Quebec, where as of Monday the province is providing free emergency daycare for kids up to age 13 whose parents are employed in health or social services, emergency services, correctional facilities and child-care centres offering support.

Ontario has also yet to match Nova Scotia which is compensating operators, paying child-care staff, and ensuring parents don't have to pay fees while daycares are closed in that province.

"Now that child care is closed in Ontario, we need to be organizing emergency child care for essential workers and figuring out how to pay staff," said Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

The coalition, along with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario, launched an online petition Friday urging the Ford government to close all child-care programs in the wake of a decision by school boards to shutter centres in schools.

More than 7,000 parents, early childhood educators and daycare operators signed the petition before Ontario's chief medical officer of health Dr. David Williams recommended all child care provinces to close.

At Queen's Park, Williams said he is "assessing and reviewing" how essential workers such as nurses and doctors will be able to cope on the home front without child care.

"If it becomes an issue and we become aware of it, we would look at ideas and alternatives that would assist, especially to ensure that our essential staff can report to work and continue to serve our health system," he told reporters.

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