

# Toronto to offer free, 24-7 childcare for essential workers after Ontario gives go-ahead <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTED

TORONTO -- Ontario will open emergency child care centres during the COVID-19 pandemic to free up front-line essential service employees, who are battling the deadly virus that has infected hundreds in the province.

Education Minister Stephen Lecce announced on Sunday that a handful of licensed child care operators across the province will be exempt from a provincial order to shut down, allowing them to reopen their doors for essential workers.

The centres are expected to open by the end of this week, Lecce said.

"During this unprecedented situation, we need to do everything we can to ensure our health care and other front-line staff have the support they need to continue to work," Lecce said.

The government said the emergency child care centres would be open to doctors, nurses, paramedics, firefighters, police and correctional officers.

Officials with the ministry of education said the number of childcare centres would be determined by municipalities based on the need in communities across the province.

The government is promising local options will be available for essential service workers – free of charge.

Child care operators would be given their usual funding, a ministry official told CTV News Toronto, while the government would work with municipalities "should any additional costs be incurred."

Lecce also said health and safety would be top of mind during the outbreak and emergency daycares would be required to have exposure protocols in case a child, caregiver or parent becomes a presumptive or confirmed carrier of the virus.

"We are putting strict measures in place, such as restricting the types of centres that can reopen and keeping the number of children in any one centre low," Lecce said.

While the ministry said each emergency childcare centre would operate under strict attendance guidelines with no more than 50 people per centre, those numbers could be increased or decreased based on the advice of the Ontario chief medical officer of health.

The ministry said once the list of emergency care centres have been finalized, they will be posted on the province's COVID-19 website.

## Toronto to open 24-hour child care

The City of Toronto announced on Sunday that it has received authorization from the province to reopen licensed child care centres.

Officials said the centres will be spread across Toronto in existing city-run child care facilities and be operated and staffed by its own licenced child care workers.

The city said the childcare will be at no cost, and will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week for children infant age to 12.

"We are doing everything we can at the City of Toronto to help people get through this pandemic. Thanks to our ongoing cooperation with the province, we have been able to finalize plans to open some child care centres on a 24/7 basis for health care workers and emergency responders and other essential and critical workers," Mayor John Tory said in a statement Sunday.

"This initiative – which staff are working to get up and running as quickly as possible – will help the heroes we are relying on to fight COVID-19 with their child care needs in the wake of the provincial emergency."

The city said that it will establish an online registration system that will be shared once available.

"Given social distancing is not feasible when caring for young children, additional measures will be taken," the city said in a news release.

"Precautions will include daily screening of children and families prior to admission, increased cleaning, and reduced group sizes."

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