

Toronto opening four daycares for young children of 'essential and critical' workers ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Online registration is open for essential workers with young children seeking to access four new City of Toronto emergency child-care centres during the COVID-19 crisis.

The Ontario government, which earlier ordered child-care centres closed to help prevent spread of the deadly virus, is funding them and gave the city permission to open the sites across Toronto last Sunday.

The emergency daycares, a first for Ontario, will be in existing, city-run, licensed facilities staffed by city child-care workers around the clock, seven days a week, for children under age 12.

The service will be free for those approved, whose job must be on the Ontario government's "list of workers eligible for emergency child care" and who have no other child-care alternative.

They include police officers, firefighters or others in fire protection services, health care professionals employed in that field, paramedics and people who perform duties essential to city core services, including TTC, Toronto Water and garbage collection.

To be eligible, their job must require them to report to a work location to deliver the service, without the ability to work from home. Also eligible are city staff required to report to an official work location to deliver core essential services.

If demand exceeds spots, the city will give priority access to front-line health care workers and first responders.

Councillor Joe Cressy, chair of Toronto Public Health, hopes the sites could open by Tuesday. He said the city has scouted four further child-care sites that could potentially open to meet demand.

"Every single day we have front-line heroes keeping our city running and keeping people safe," Cressy said in an interview. "Just as they are taking care of us we have a fundamental duty to take care of them ...

"Anything we can do to ease the burden on front-line workers is essential right now and we can scale up or down based on demand."

Given concerns over COVID-19's spread, the city will take extra precautions including daily screening of children and staff, extra disinfection work, reduced group sizes and a limit of 50 on people in any centre at one time.

Details on locations, the application process and more is on the city website.

Mass closure of daycares across Ontario quickly created a crunch for parents who must leave home to work. The city news release about the emergency daycares states: "The safest option for families is to have children remain at home, if possible."

At Queen's Park, Premier Doug Ford said Education Minister Stephen Lecce will be addressing child care in the next couple of days, the Star's Rob Ferguson reports.

"I get the same phone calls from people," Ford said. "One person gave me an example of they were worried if they didn't pay their \$400 they pay every week or two weeks that they'd be yanked off the list, and they'd lose their spot. That's unacceptable.

"They shouldn't be charged. That's not fair if they aren't taking care of your children," he added after announcing new fines and jail terms for price gouging.

"If you're a daycare owner, don't take advantage of people. We'll catch up to you."

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