

Free child care for essential frontline workers now underway in London ^[1]

The province is offering care at three child care centres in London on a first come, first serve basis

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Free child care for essential frontline health care workers and emergency first responders has begun in London and other centres throughout the province.

Licensed child care centres across Ontario were required to close when the province declared a state of emergency on March 17. Shortly afterward, the province decided to make an exception and allow a small number of centres to open for front-line workers who have no other child care options.

According to the City of London, three emergency child care centres are currently available in this area:

- Kids and Company – 1480 Richmond Street
- Celsea Green Children's Centre – 250 Thompson Rd
- Kid Logic – 750 Wharncliffe Rd S

The service is available on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Information provided on the City's website says "children born in 2014 and 2015 may be able to be accommodated in pre-school programs at centres with openings."

The child care is being provided free of charge to eligible families. The city says a waitlist will be developed after all spots have been filled.

The service is being phased-in over several days, and at least one of the providers says it will not operate as usual.

Kids to be closely screened

Linda Starr, a vice-president with Kids & Company, says signage is posted on the main entrance doors of its operation stating that that anyone with COVID-19 symptoms will not be allowed to enter.

"Further screening will commence at the front door of the centre of all children and family members asking if there are any new symptoms from the previous day to ensure they are free of all COVID-19 symptoms." Starr wrote in a statement.

If, after screening, a child shows any symptoms of the virus, staff would contact the parents and the local health unit.

"We would ensure the child is cared for away from other children and staff, and ask the parents to come and pick up the child as soon as possible," said Starr.

Children with symptoms would be excluded from child care for 14 days after the onset of symptoms, and the centre would be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized, according to the statement.

Social distancing for young children

One of the more challenging tasks for staff of emergency child care centres may be to ensure kids comply with the provincial directives for social distancing.

Starr said Kids & Company realizes children are very sociable and social distancing can be a challenging concept for them. But she said her company's London centre will be supervising smaller groups of children and will increase outdoor play activities that support physical distancing.

She said low staff-to-child ratios will also be in place.

Teachers at Kids & Company will be provided with protective supplies including medical gloves to use throughout the day as needed, as well as hand sanitizer, soap and water, and other cleaning supplies, according to the statement.

Managers of London's other emergency child care centres were unavailable for comment when this story was published.

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