

Who can watch essential workers' children? ^[1]

Author: Monsebraaten, Laurie

Source: The Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 17 Mar 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

A licensed child-care operator near Sunnybrook Hospital says health-care workers are “begging” her to stay open so they can continue saving lives amid schools and daycares being closed to combat COVID-19.

The private operator, licensed to care for 11 children between the ages of one and four, has reached out to the hospital and the province, in a bid to help.

“I know I can (safely) stay open because we are small. I only had three children attending Monday,” said the operator, who was closed Tuesday and did not want to be named for fear of reprisals from city and provincial officials.

Toronto’s medical officer of health, Dr. Eileen de Villa, who on Friday urged all licensed child care to close, added bars, nightclubs and theatres to the list Monday and asked restaurants to move to takeout and delivery. Those who defied her would be ordered to close under the Health Protection and Promotion Act and liable for fines up to \$25,000 a day, she said.

“It was the fine that really got to me, so I need some clarity on that as a private business owner,” said the Toronto daycare operator, adding a physician with two small children was on the phone Monday evening “begging” her to stay open so they could continue going to work.

Dr. David Williams, Ontario’s chief medical officer of health, waited until Monday to recommend all licensed daycares close, saying concern around providing child care for essential workers was the main reason he didn’t suggest closing them last week.

But Tuesday, after Premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency in the province that has added private schools, licensed child care, bars and restaurants to the list of services to be shuttered, both Queen’s Park and the city are scrambling to figure out daycare for essential workers.

The city of Toronto is expected to announce plans Wednesday afternoon, said Councillor Joe Cressy, chair of the city’s board of health.

“We have been working on alternate child care arrangements for this purpose and plan to share the final details (Wednesday),” he said in an email.

A spokesperson for Education Minister Stephen Lecce said the province is also “looking into options for child care for workers in the essential services.”

“Hopefully in the coming days we will have an update,” Alexandra Adamo said in an interview Tuesday. “This is definitely something we are looking at.”

She said municipalities “will play an integral role in this rollout.”

“We recognize this needs to be done as soon as possible ... but obviously we need to take into account rural Ontario, on-reserve and things like that,” she added.

The province is also looking at how to support daycare operators, child-care staff who are not working and parents who are being asked to continue paying fees while their programs are closed, she said.

“We are hoping to provide more clarity on child care as a whole in the coming days,” Adamo said.

On Monday, Quebec began offering free emergency daycare for children up to age 13 for a broad list of essential workers including those in health and social services, emergency services, corrections and child care workers on the job.

Nova Scotia has said it will compensate daycare operators who have been forced to close during the pandemic and are paying staff, so parents don’t have to continue paying fees.

Ontario child-care advocates say they are pleased the city and Queen’s Park are working on plans for essential workers in this province.

“First of all, they should be clear about who is an essential worker,” said Martha Friendly of the Toronto-based Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

“And the conditions under which people get to use (daycare) should be clear also because capacity is an issue,” she said. “It’s not only preschool children, but school-age children too.”

In Europe, where countries have broad public child-care systems, emergency care is being limited to single parents who are deemed essential workers and to families where both parents do this work, she said.

Related link:

Region: Canada ^[3]

Source URL (modified on 13 Apr 2020): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/04/who-can-watch-essential-workers%E2%80%99-children>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/04/who-can-watch-essential-workers%E2%80%99-children> ^[2]

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/03/17/who-can-watch-essential-workers-children.html> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864>