

Thousands of child-care spaces still available in B.C. for children of essential workers ^[1]

Fewer than 3,000 referrals have been given for more than 50,000 spots provincewide

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPT

If you are working on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic in B.C. and struggling to find someone to watch your children, there are likely spaces still available with professionals in your community.

According to the provincial government, 2,650 essential workers have been referred to a licensed child-care provider using a new system the government launched at the end of March.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development said in a statement that as of April 16, more than 2,500 child-care centres have a total of almost 59,000 spaces available to service that need.

Some child-care providers say they expected demand for their services to be higher and, while referrals may be given out, not all parents are taking the next step and actually using them.

Referred but not registered

Pam Preston, executive director of Westcoast Childcare Resource Centre, which gives referrals to essential workers for child-care providers in Vancouver, said about 65 per cent of the estimated 200 people who have received a referral have not registered their children at any facility.

"We know there are a lot of vacant spaces in the city right now," said Preston.

The primary reasons parents gave for not registering their children were concerns about health and safety.

"You can't do 100 per cent physical distancing with young children," said Preston, adding that parents may not know about health and safety protocols that are in place.

Jennifer Ratcliffe, owner of Pebble Lane Early Learning in South Surrey, is experiencing a drop in demand first-hand.

Ratcliffe cares for children under the age of five and normally has a full house with more than 25 children plus a wait list. She decided to stay open to care for the children of essential workers, but did not expect business to be so slow.

Pebble Lane had no new registrations at all in the first few weeks after the province announced child care for essential workers. Ratcliffe said she heard from colleagues at other child-care facilities in her area that they were also struggling to fill spaces.

Ratcliffe said she understands parents may be hesitant because of health concerns, but she has been assured by the province in several teleconference meetings that the chances of a child getting sick in her care are slim, especially in light of all the extra sanitizing she is doing.

"We are able to keep things at a really, really low risk," Ratcliffe said Thursday on The Early Edition

In the last few days, Ratcliffe said she has seen a slight bump in registration. She attributes that to other child-care centres closing because their numbers were too low to justify staying open.

Eligibility and access

The government said it has invested \$38 million as part of the initiative to allow essential service workers to have access to reliable licensed child care and to ensure centres are able to reopen or stay open.

The children of workers in health care, social services, law enforcement, first responders and emergency response are eligible for a referral.

The ministry said essential workers needing child care can fill out an online form or call 1-888-338-6622. Workers will then be contacted and connected with available licensed spaces.

For essential service workers with children older than five years, school districts are providing access to in-school supports during regular school hours and access to care before and after school hours.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: spaces ^[4]

health and safety ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 30 Apr 2020): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/04/thousands-child-care-spaces-still-available-bc-children-essential>

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