

# Ontario expands emergency child care, but no timing for all centres to reopen <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

TORONTO — Ontario expanded emergency child care to more people Wednesday, but while the province also saw its lowest growth rate of new COVID-19 cases in weeks, the government wouldn't say when all centres might reopen.

There were 347 new COVID-19 cases reported Wednesday, increasing the provincial total by just 2.3 per cent.

Under the province's reopening framework, the chief medical officer is looking for a consistent, two-to-four-week decrease in the number of new cases before advising moving to the first stage.

Premier Doug Ford said the numbers are looking good, as four out of the past five days have seen growth in new cases decline.

"This is a positive trend, a positive trend to give people hope that we're getting close to opening up," he said.

"I can't give you dates right now, but what I can give you is hope that we're getting closer."

Reopening child-care centres is key to restarting the economy, Education Minister Stephen Lecce acknowledged, but he wants to do so safely.

"The government fully understands and recognizes that child care is often a prerequisite for labour market participation," Lecce said.

"We get that and we will be able to report more on the details of each of those stages in the coming days."

Green party Leader Mike Schreiner said that child care providers are facing permanent closure during the pandemic as they still have fixed costs to pay and may not be eligible for existing government programs.

"The province should step in with stabilization funding so that child care programs are ready with open doors when the province reopens," he said in a statement.

Lecce wouldn't commit to a timeline to reopen all child-care centres, which are currently closed until at least May 6 under the emergency order that can only be extended for two weeks at a time.

For now, emergency child care is expanding to parents who work in retirement homes, grocery stores and pharmacies, truck drivers, workers in the food supply chain, as well as Canadian Armed Forces and Department of National Defence staff in the province.

The province ordered child-care centres closed in March, under one of several COVID-19 emergency orders, but reopened some to accommodate children of front-line health-care and emergency services personnel.

Wednesday's announcement marked the second expansion of emergency child care, and will mean another 37 centres open in addition to the nearly 100 others in operation.

Meanwhile, one of the emergency child-care centres in Toronto has closed for two weeks after four staff members and one child tested positive for COVID-19.

Ford said in light of that, he wants every emergency child-care worker tested. They are not yet included in provincial guidelines for testing, beyond those who are showing symptoms, but the premier's office said Ford has asked officials to develop a plan.

Chief medical officer of health Dr. David Williams has said that watching how the emergency child-care centres operate will factor into decisions about how and when to reopen them more broadly.

Currently, no emergency child-care site can accommodate more than 50 people. Staff are also screened before entering, no visitors are allowed, and the centres must be thoroughly cleaned every day before opening, Lecce said.

Ontario has now seen 15,728 cases of COVID-19, with 996 deaths. There are 9,612 resolved cases — more than 60 per cent of the total.

The number of people in hospital with COVID-19 rose on Wednesday, though the number of patients in intensive care and on ventilators decreased slightly.

There was an increase of 45 more deaths, though a separate long-term care database showed an increase of 70 deaths in those facilities over the previous day.

In long-term care, there has now been 775 deaths, 2,632 confirmed cases in residents and 1,361 confirmed cases in staff members. There are 159 homes reported to have active outbreaks.

About 45 per cent of all of the long-term care deaths have happened in just 11 homes.

The most up-to-date information on retirement homes — which comes from a third provincial source — is that there are also 61 outbreaks in those facilities, with 593 cases in residents, 263 cases in staff, and 117 deaths.

Meanwhile, a union that represents approximately 60,000 health care workers said a second personal support worker has died of COVID-19.

Service Employees International Union Healthcare said Wednesday that a female home care worker in Peel Region died from the virus.

“Like many health care workers precariously employed, she was a dedicated PSW who served her community through multiple employers and facilities in the Peel Region,” union president Sharleen Stewart said in a statement.

Ontario reported doing 11,554 tests in the previous 24 hours and has said it will do 14,000 tests daily by Wednesday — a number that would be reflected in Thursday’s data.

That 14,000 target is down from a previous target of doing 18,900 tests a day by mid-April.

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**Region:** Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

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