

Nova Scotia to reassess child-care needs of essential workers ^[1]

Premier says public health and Education Department will analyze what's required

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EXCERPTS

Nova Scotia Premier Stephen McNeil says his government is evaluating the child-care needs of essential service workers around the province as the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced support options for some people.

On Thursday, students with some of Dalhousie University's allied health programs called on the government to fill gaps in need so essential service workers could focus on their jobs and not be concerned about how to take care of their kids.

The students had been offering a volunteer support program, which included child care, but it's come to an end as their academic demands have ramped back up. Even before that happened, students involved in the effort said the demand for their services far outpaced what they were able to offer.

Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada not to have offered some level of regulated daycare support for essential service workers, even after schools and daycares were shut down by public health protocols. Unregulated child-care operations were allowed to stay open.

On Friday, during his regular COVID-19 briefing, McNeil said the government looked at offering something similar to what other provinces were doing several weeks ago but many jurisdictions weren't seeing strong uptake in the service.

Seeking a model that works

Although some workers have benefited from family support or help from others in their community, McNeil said he knows that hasn't been the case for everyone and the Education Department and public health plan to re-evaluate what's available. Schools and regulated daycares remain closed at least until the long weekend in May.

"As more and more people start going back to work, we will have to find a child-care model that works for all of us and that's where our focus will be in the coming weeks," he said.

McNeil and Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Robert Strang announced the first easing of public health restrictions on Friday. The premier said he's also asked Health Minister Randy Delorey and deputy health minister Dr. Kevin Orrell to begin talks about when short-stay and day-surgery procedures and clinics can resume.

"This will be the first step in trying to understand how to open our health-care system up under new protocols," McNeil said.

Strang will also begin liaising with government departments and organizations that represent various types of businesses "to figure out what a new normal looks like," the premier said.

"It is my hope that a road map will start to take shape as conversations about opening our economy take place," McNeil said.

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