

Some frequently asked questions about progressive opening of daycares ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Daycares in the region outside the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal (CMM) are preparing to welcome babies and preschoolers on May 11, with the opening date for daycares located within the CMM, conditions permitting, slated for May 19.

For parents who plan to use daycare services, here is a selection of frequently asked questions, with answers supplied by the Quebec government or by daycare directors interviewed by the Montreal Gazette.

Are all educators compelled to return to work?

No. It is recommended that educators who are pregnant, age 60-plus, or with underlying health conditions not return to work until September. Also, children with underlying health conditions should not return to daycare until September.

Are all the children returning at the same time?

No. It will be a progressive return. In the regions, for the first two weeks (called Phase 1) daycares are allowed to function at 30 per cent capacity. Phase 2 will increase to 50 per cent capacity for the third week. Two weeks later, the Phase 3 capacity will increase to 75 per cent and Phase 4 will see daycares functioning at 100 per cent capacity, beginning June 22. The June date is subject to change if public health authorities rule a full return should be postponed.

The progressive return will be slightly different for daycares in the CMM, conditions permitting. Phase 1 will function at 30 per cent capacity for one week, Phase 2 will be 50 per cent capacity for the second week and Phase 3 will see a possible bump to 75 per cent capacity. Two weeks after that, Phase 4 will hit 100 per cent capacity on June 22, conditions permitting.

What are some of the measures being put in place to prevent COVID-19 infection?

Hugging and shaking hands is forbidden.

Children must not share toys.

Staff and children should limit the number of objects transported to and from the daycare.

Cups, dishes and utensils must not be shared.

What physical-distancing measures will be observed?

Daycare playgrounds are off-limits.

Two-metre distancing should be adhered to as much as possible between staff and between groups of children.

The ratio of child:educator will be reduced.

For Phase 1 and Phase 2, the ratio will be 2:1 for babies; 4:1 for 18 months old to just under 4 years old; and 5:1 for 4 year olds. Phase 3 will see the ratio increase to 3:1, 6:1 and 8:1. The ratio for Phase 4 will be 5:1, 8:1 and 10:1.

What is the hygiene protocol?

Hand sanitizer, soap and paper towels will be supplied. Hands must be washed when entering the building, before and after each activity, before and after lunch and snack, after nose blowing and using the bathroom, and when leaving the daycare at the end of the day.

All surfaces that are touched frequently – such as door handles, light switches, faucets and microwaves – must be washed frequently throughout the day.

Cough and sneeze into the elbow or a tissue.

Personal protective equipment, such as masks and visors, will be supplied for the educators because it is predicted that it will be difficult to

consistently maintain a two-metre distance in a daycare setting.

Will there be enough educators to staff the daycares and enough daycare spots for all the children?

That remains to be seen. There was a shortage of educators before the pandemic and now – with some educators told to stay home, others afraid to return and some shutting down their service permanently – the shortage could worsen. Students studying early childhood education have been used to fill in during the summer months in the past. It is uncertain whether that will be the case this summer.

During Tuesday's briefing, Quebec Premier François Legault fielded questions about reports of a shortage of daycare spaces. He asked people to be "flexible" as the progressive openings sort themselves out and that once things are up and running people should be able to find the spots they need.

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