

N.S. daycares, businesses prepare to reopen while waiting for government plan ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

HALIFAX -- There may not be an official plan in place for reopening Nova Scotia's economy just yet, but businesses like Tim Hortons are already getting ready for how they will operate post-pandemic.

"We already have in the restaurant, mandatory masks and gloves for our teammates, we're taking the temperature of everyone that's coming in on shift. We have acrylic shields when you're ordering, we have contactless trays that we use to pass you your food," said Duncan Fulton, Tim Hortons' chief corporate officer.

"As we set up the dining rooms again, we're making sure that the tables are all two metres apart, we're making sure that the tables and chairs are sanitized after every single use."

Fulton says Tim Hortons has the benefit of having restaurants in 100 countries around the world and have been through the reopening phase already in Asia.

"We've been working with every jurisdiction in Canada very, very closely. So, operationally, we're ready to go, as soon as local governments believe it's safe to reopen those dining rooms."

While a plan is still under development, reopening will roll out in phases, over time. Each phase could last a minimum of 28 days.

In addition to opening up more businesses, allowing additional outdoor activities and restarting non-urgent health-care services will be near the top of the first phase.

"I have a meeting coming up in the next few days to start to support them, how they develop their plans to safely return to practice. One of our priorities is dental care," said Dr. Robert Strang, the province's chief medical officer of health.

Daycares are also expected to resume operations in the first phase of Nova Scotia's reopening.

"We are definitely eager to get back to work. We miss the kids and the families greatly, so we are looking forward to that. We are hopeful just for a slow and steady approach to reopening," said Jillian Farris, who operates A Tiny Lab for Early Learning.

Despite being closed for the last two months, Farris says early child-care educators in Nova Scotia are fortunate, because funding has continued during the closure.

"It's only Nova Scotia and P.E.I. that has received continuous support from our government. Which means that we've continued to pay our educators their salaries. So that support has been incredible for our sector," says Farris.

It's hoped daycares will reopen by June 8, but there are still a lot of unknowns about what operations will look like once things do resume.

Farris says she and other daycare directors across Nova Scotia are working on a worst-case pandemic plan for their reopening.

"A big concern for us is, it's impossible to socially distance with children. And as educators of young children, we don't necessarily want to socially distance from children so that definitely is a concern for us," said Farris.

"I know a lot of us are looking at, how we can secure PPE (personal protective equipment) for our staff should we need it? How are we securing supplies? May we have to restrict access to our centres? Do we have to do daily health screenings?"

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