

# People must 'embrace the risk' of reopening daycares for the sake of recovery, Cardy says <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

New Brunswick's minister of education says reopening daycares is a risk, but a necessary one.

Dominic Cardy said every stage of reopening in the context of a pandemic that "thrives" outside the province involves risk.

"We have to bluntly embrace the [risk] if we're going to come out on the other side of this as a province with a functioning economy," he said at a press conference Thursday.

Cardy and Nicole Gervais, executive director for early childhood development, answered questions from media as New Brunswick moves into its second phase of recovery from COVID-19.

New Brunswick has not seen a new case of COVID-19 in seven days. There are two active cases, both of which were travel-related. The province has seen a total of 120 confirmed cases of COVID-19.

The government announced regulated daycares can begin reopening May 19 as part of the COVID-19 recovery plan. They've been shut for everyone but essential workers since March. Some daycares laid off workers and closed completely, but others kept their employees and kept charging parents.

As part of the reopening rules, children won't be able to mingle outside their self-contained groups of no more than 15. Children and staff will have their temperatures checked every morning, one adult per family should be designated for drop off and pick up, and there will be strict cleaning protocols.

Cardy said each child's household bubble "must remain intact."

"If folks break the bubble, they risk exposing their bubble to folks from early childhood education centres," he said.

Cardy said group sizes will be slightly expanded for older children who will be better at maintaining physical distancing, but younger kids will remain in small group sizes.

## Parents don't actually have a choice, we have a dilemma.- Tracy Engstrom, Moncton mother

For people who don't feel comfortable taking this risk and sending their children to daycare, Cardy says "they're citizens of a free country."

"If we avoid all risk it means we do not do anything in New Brunswick until ... we develop a vaccine," he said.

Tracy Engstrom, a Moncton mother of two, said asking parents to risk their children's safety for the sake of restarting the economy is not fair.

She said some parents might have to choose between risking their children's health by sending them to daycare and losing their job if they can't continue working from home.

"Parents don't actually have a choice, we have a dilemma," she said. "Do we risk the health of our children for the safety of the economy?"

She said there should be another way one parent can be supported by the government to either continue working from home or stay at home with the children while the other continues working and helping rebuild the economy.

"Why does it have to be 'everybody go back to work?'" she said.

Engstrom said if she doesn't return her children to her daycare, she will have to pay a four-week-notice service cancellation fee. She said that which would be \$1,000 per child for her, so \$2,000 total.

"It's unethical for children who can't advocate for themselves to take that risk, at this time, and so early in the state of the pandemic," she

said.

The province has also launched an online guide for parents to answer frequently asked questions.

### 'Critical mass'

Provincial spokesperson Danielle Elliott said there are 837 licensed early learning and childcare facilities in the province and, as of Thursday, more than 350 facilities said they would be ready to open May 19.

"We believe that we will have critical mass of available daycares," Gervais said.

Cardy said much like other private businesses allowed to reopen in this new phase, daycares are reopening in a "staggered" way.

Some daycares still don't want to open, and, as private businesses, "that is their choice," Cardy said.

Cardy also said there's a plan for a \$20 surcharge per child to allow for extra cleaning. This is part of a \$1 million-per-month financial package to support operators, Cardy said.

Cardy previously said it's fair for parents to keep paying even if their children are not attending daycare because the payments act as a "place holder" for when their children can go back, and the fees help daycares continue paying employees.

The province previously announced it will pay the fees of any parent who lost their income because of COVID-19. This financial assistance will continue for parents still needing it until the end of June "as you prepare to return to work," Cardy said.

Gervais said after direct communication with operators, the province still doesn't know exactly how many parents will be rejoining the workforce and needing childcare or will be making the decision to keep their child home for the summer.

"We're going to be rolling as things come and considering other measures if it is required," she said.

Some parents and operators have been worried about how safe it is to reopen daycares, considering the risk of another outbreak and the challenges of maintaining physical distancing in these facilities.

Dr. Jennifer Russell, the province's chief medical officer of health, said she understands those concerns, but the province is taking an "evidence-based" approach where it will "balance the risk with what the necessities are."

### Masks, babysitters

Gervais said they're not requiring staff to wear masks in childcare facilities, except in situations where a child or an educator gets sick during the day. Then they need to be isolated from other children and other educators in the daycare. If they can't have a two-metre distance while being isolated, they should wear a mask.

She said children under the age of two do not have to wear masks.

"Putting the mask on, taking it off, playing with masks renders the mask worse than useless, encourages people to touch their face."

Gervais said if people need babysitters, they can add a person from outside their bubble, but it's preferable if they can rely on someone within their two-household bubble.

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[2] <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/new-brunswick-daycare-reopening-recovery-plan-childcare-1.5569217>

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