

Child-care spaces for Phase 2 on P.E.I. cut by about half from pre-pandemic ^[1]

'As we go into Phase 3 and more businesses open, of course we'll need to expand'

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EXCERPTS

The P.E.I. government is preparing to open up 3,300 licensed child-care spaces beginning May 22, said P.E.I. Minister of Education Brad Trivers at an afternoon news briefing Friday.

Before COVID-19 spread to the Island in March, prompting public health officials to close schools and daycares, there were about 6,000 licensed spots — roughly double the number of spaces expected to be available next Friday.

"As we go into Phase 3 and more businesses open, of course we'll need to expand from there," said Carolyn Simpson, the province's early years advisor.

Trivers said the province's emergency COVID-19 child-care services are currently looking after 950 children, whose parents have experienced reduced hours or lost their jobs because of the pandemic.

For now, Trivers encouraged parents who have been using family members and friends for child care to keep doing so. Parents who have trouble in finding spots are being asked to get in touch with officials.

"We don't know exactly what the demand's going to be," he said. "We're going to rise to the occasion to support all families to meet that demand as best as possible."

As the province's ease-back plan enters Phase 2 next Friday, he said the number of licensed operators will increase from 22 to 155 on P.E.I.

Limited capacity

Trivers said centres will still need to follow protocols set out by the Chief Public Health Office, which currently includes physical distancing measures and limits on the number of children and staff allowed to occupy spaces.

For instance, he said group size at licensed centres is being limited to five people, and centres will cap the total number of people at 20.

"Remember, safety is our first priority," Trivers said.

Due to reduced capacity at centres because of COVID-19, should they need more space to provide care, the province will look to use schools within the Public Schools Branch and the French Language School Board.

We are committed to supporting all families.— Brad Trivers

But the reopening of schools will be limited to child-care use. There is still no talk of resuming classes.

Parents who are forced to work outside the home such as those working in the fishing, construction and landscaping industries will be given priority for spaces, Trivers said.

Children who were being cared for at a licensed daycare before the pandemic will have priority to return to that centre.

"But if you are not returning to work during this phase, you will not lose your space in the centre."

He added that essential workers using licensed centres will continue to have a spot.

"We are committed to supporting all families."

Home-based child care

Parent fees will be reintroduced gradually as they return to work. From May 22 until the traditional end of the school year on June 26, a childcare subsidy of \$75 per child, per week, will be offered to parents to help offset the cost.

Private, home-based centres which will also be opening will be permitted to take up to seven children. Trivers said there are more than 300 such centres on P.E.I.

Simpson said planning surrounding child care during Phase 3 of the province's ease-back plan will begin next week. Simpson noted that infants will be included in the province's plan for child care in Phase 3.

"The further expansion of child-care services will depend on how well we are doing in reopening our province and the public health and safety requirements at that time," Trivers said.

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