

Prince Edward Island to offer \$75 per week stipend for childcare starting May 22 ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Premier Dennis King provided some details Wednesday about plans for daycare services for Island parents who could be returning to work as of May 22.

May 22 is the start of the Province's second phase of its plan to re-open, which will see the reopening of some retail businesses, services like barbers and hairdressers and the restart of remaining construction operations. All unlicensed and licensed childcare operators are also due to reopen.

Up to this point, daycare fees for essential workers have been suspended. King said the fees will be re-instituted for parents "on a gradual phased-in basis," starting May 22. But King said the Province will be offering a \$75 per week stipend to parents for each child enrolled in licensed child care facilities. The funds will go directly to the provider.

King said individuals accessing childcare through private providers can apply for the same stipend, which will be provided as a reimbursement. The stipend will be offered from May 22 until June 26.

"Childcare and daycare should not and must not be a barrier to returning to work," King said.

Daycare services are already being offered for 850 children of essential workers since the beginning of the pandemic, King said during a media briefing Wednesday.

While schools will remain closed for regular classes, school classrooms will be used for daycare services. King said this will increase the current number of daycare spaces, for children below the age of six, to 1,100.

Prior the start of the pandemic, there were 6,150 children enrolled in early childhood centres.

Home-based providers will be able to provide services to a limited number of school-age children, King said. Prior to the pandemic, 2,296 children were enrolled in school-aged care.

King said private home-based providers can take up to seven school-aged children at a time. He said this would make 2,100 spaces available.

When asked about assurances that it is safe for parents to enrol their children back in daycare, Chief Health Officer Heather Morrison said guidelines are already in place for childcare facilities. The numbers of children in each facility are limited and physical distancing measures are in place.

"It's about staggered entry, it's about the really important screening of both staff and children before they even get into the facility. It's about the enhanced cleaning," Morrison said.

King said more details will be released Friday.

Morrison also announced an easing of a mandatory two-week quarantine for essential workers who travel off-Island for work. She said essential workers, including those travelling to the United States, will have the option of being tested upon arrival in P.E.I. and of having another test within seven days of arrival. If they choose to do so, they will not be required to self-quarantine for 14 days upon arrival.

"They would stay self-isolated until that first test comes back negative," Morrison said of the new guidelines.

"Then they will get a repeat test at seven days."

King also addressed incidences of apparent racism or prejudice on the Island. King said these were "isolated cases."

"You hear things about people being asked to leave a store because they look like a temporary foreign worker," King said.

"As an Islander, it's offensive."

King said COVID-19 does not care about the colour of one's skin or one's language.

Other Provinces have seen a rise in racist attacks and incidents, particularly targeting individuals of Asian descent.

"I just want to encourage Islanders to remember who we are. We are an open, welcoming society," King said.

There were no new cases of COVID-19 announced on P.E.I. Wednesday.

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