

Restrictions to ease further in child-care centres when P.E.I. enters Phase 3 ^[1]

'It's always good to be reminded we are still in the midst of a pandemic'

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EXCERPTS

Just because restrictions are easing at child-care centres doesn't mean there will be an influx of spaces right away, says the executive director of the Early Childhood Development Association of P.E.I.

Next week marks the start of Phase 3 of the province's plan to ease COVID-19 restrictions, which includes the removal of the current cap of 20 people per licensed child-care centre.

The maximum number of children in a play school room will go from five to seven, in addition to one adult. In a school-age group, maximum enrolment numbers will shift from five to 15, including one educator.

But enrolment remains at the discretion of each centre individually, and will depend on staffing and facilities.

"Monday will only see some changes in numbers where centres can accommodate those changes," said Sonya Hooper, executive director of the Early Childhood Development Association of P.E.I.

"We still have legislation in place that dictates ratios, and then we have the centres that have to look at their space in relation to all the above and do what's in the best interest of the children and staff that they have available."

Also starting next week, infants will once again be allowed in child-care centres. Hooper said due to established ratios and physical distancing, reintegration of infants could pose additional challenges. She said how quickly that happens will be on a centre-by-centre basis.

"The decision to do that will be between centres and their families," said Hooper. "Again, it would depend on the staffing that's needed at centres and whether they can manage that increase in ratio to bring their infants back into their program."

On Wednesday in the legislature, Education Minister Brad Trivers said physical distancing must still be adhered to and enhanced handwashing and cleaning practices will continue.

As will screening practices and staggered drop-offs and pickups.

At this time, he said, there will be no mixing of groups at any point in child-care centres, and siblings will continue to be in the same group.

Hooper said moving forward discussions will continue on how to best support both children and educators at this time. She said even as restrictions continue to be lifted, new COVID-19 cases in New Brunswick are a reminder of why it's important to go slow and continue to follow the recommendations of the Chief Public Health Office.

"It's always good to be reminded we are still in the midst of a pandemic," said Hooper.

"So I think that it's just as important to remember that we still need to have all the protocols in place that are laid out."

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