

Ontario child care centres can reopen as early as Friday with some restrictions to curb spread of COVID-19 ^[1]

Author: Monsebraaten, Laurie & Rushowy, Kristin

Source: The Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 9 Jun 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

The Ontario government has given daycare centres the go-ahead to open as early as this Friday, but advocates say that without additional funding the province is “asking the impossible.”

“We need to make sure supports are in place so people can have peace of mind going back to work,” Premier Doug Ford said Tuesday from Queen’s Park, adding centres will open “with some restrictions” to ensure the safety of staff and children amid ongoing concerns about COVID-19.

Education Minister Stephen Lecce said similar to the emergency child care provided for front-line workers, centres will screen staff and kids, enhance cleaning, ban visitors, set a limit of 10 people — staff and kids — in an enclosed space and remove all toys that can easily spread germs.

But Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care called the province’s plan “completely unworkable” — and unaffordable — for providers.

“They are asking the impossible, if they are expecting child-care centres to meet similar criteria as emergency child care but with no additional money,” she said in an interview.

Child care operators providing free care to essential workers around the clock during the pandemic say their costs have almost tripled, Ferns said. And while the province is picking up all the costs of the emergency care, parents could be on the hook when those programs wind down June 26, she added.

“How are they going to do that without parent fees going through the roof?” she asked. “Some centres may just not open.”

Although Lecce said he would maximize the existing child care budget to help centres cover the extra cost of cleaning and personal protective equipment, Ferns said that budget is “already maxed out. There is no more maximizing it.”

Lecce said Tuesday the federal government and province have provided programs for rent and wage relief and his ministry has “extended additional support for operating funding for fixed costs ... and we’ve said that on a one-by-one basis we will make sure we’re there for operators on a needs basis to get them through this difficulty” for help with things such as additional cleaning staff and PPE.

“That type of funding can apply for those types of ancillary costs imposed on our operations,” he said. “And we’re going to make sure there’s flexibility in our support to really respond to challenges today, in the coming quarters, in the coming years, to make sure the sector is viable, the parents can return to work as I say with confidence that their kids are going to be kept safe.”

Parents, Lecce added, can rest assured that if they choose not to send their children back, they won’t lose their spots and because not all kids will return, “we believe we have sufficient capacity” to handle demand.

Front-line workers, he added, will continue to be given priority for spaces.

NDP Child Care Critic Doly Begum accused the government of “setting child care centres up for fee hikes or permanent shutdowns.”

Many are already “hanging on by a thread, struggling to pay the rent and bills to make it through the pandemic closures,” said Begum, the MPP for Scarborough Southwest.

Ontario, she added, already has the highest child-care fees in the country, with infant spaces costing more than \$20,000 a year in some areas. And with families’ finances in disarray because of the pandemic, they also need assistance.

Ferns noted that in Nova Scotia, the government is picking up parent fees until at least September.

Despite the province-wide shutdown because of the pandemic, Queen’s Park has funded free child care for essential workers in licensed programs across the province, serving an average of about 1,500 children a day.

(One outbreak was recorded at Toronto's Jesse Ketchum centre, where at least 13 staff and seven children, including an 8-month-old baby, became ill with COVID-19. The centre closed April 28 and reopened May 14. All children and staff have since recovered.)

Lecce has said child care is a "prerequisite" for parents — particularly women — to participate in the workforce.

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario say daycare staff and administrators are also seeking clear provincial guidelines and training from public health, increased paid sick and emergency leave days, smaller group sizes, additional staff and supports and paid planning time before reopening.

Related link:

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: government ^[4]
health and safety ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 10 Jun 2020): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/06/ontario-child-care-centres-can-reopen-early-friday-some-restrictions>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/06/ontario-child-care-centres-can-reopen-early-friday-some-restrictions> [2] <https://www.thestar.com/politics/provincial/2020/06/09/ontario-child-care-centres-to-reopen-friday-with-some-restrictions-to-curb-spread-of-covid-19.html> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8941> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/health-and-safety>