

# Education minister says pandemic child care in Newfoundland and Labrador is an evolving situation <sup>[1]</sup>

Tom Osborne says department will work to overcome issues as they emerge

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

ST. JOHN'S, N.L. —

When Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Janice Fitzgerald locked down the province last March because of the COVID-19 pandemic, that included the shutdown of child-care services.

When she locked down the province again on Feb. 12 for a two-week circuit breaker, there was an allowance made for regulated child-care facilities to remain open.

While giving an update on regulated child care on Wednesday, Education Minister Tom Osborne said the province knows more today than it did almost a year ago.

"And our experience from the previous Alert Level 5 shows us that child care is of crucial importance to our essential workforce," Osborne said in St. John's.

For that reason child care is now only for the use of essential workers who have to leave their home to go to their workplace, and does not apply to essential workers who work from home.

Following the recommendation will lessen attendance, thus reducing risk, Osborne said.

It may not be convenient in all cases, and he asked parents for understanding if operators have to turn them away.

Osborne said planning has taken place since last March to deal with another event like the current situation, but some question whether it was enough.

"There were plans in place, but the best-laid plans have to be tested against reality, and the reality is the variant, the speed at which the pandemic spread as a result of the variant most recently," he said.

"... our experience from the previous Alert Level 5 shows us that child care is of crucial importance to our essential workforce." — Tom Osborne

Osborne said there are no concrete answers with an evolving situation and any plans made have to evolve as the situation evolves.

"We don't have all the answers. What we do have is a commitment to support families for this challenging time. As issues emerge we will work to identify options to overcome them."

On Monday the department reacted to some concerns by increasing access to full-day child care for parents whose children normally only attend a regulated facility after school.

It also clarified that parents whose children do not attend their normal regulated child-care service during this period will not be required to pay for days they do not attend and they will not lose their spot.

The government will cover the parent fee for those child-care services that remain open during this period for any child who does not attend.

For any child that does attend, parents will continue to pay for their normal fees.

Any regulated child-care services that remain open or are forced to close due to positive COVID-19 cases or for testing will continue to

receive their full funding regardless of attendance levels.

Regulated child-care services that choose to close voluntarily will not receive regular funding.

When asked what happens if all parents claim to be essential and a child-care service is full, Osborne said the department believes that to be highly unlikely and has heard that most services are operating well below capacity. If a service finds itself in that situation they can advise the department and it will consult with public health, he said.

In terms of unregulated service, Osborne said the province does not have any oversight into or regulation applying to these services, nor are they entitled to compensation.

To meet the needs of parents, Osborne was asked if school settings or child-care centres at the College of the North Atlantic or Memorial University could be kept open for use by essential workers.

**UPDATE!** After consultation with the CMOH and the NLESD, the department has approved the availability for full-day early learning and child care for school-age children during the two week “circuit-breaker” period ending February 26,

2021. <https://t.co/EJHD0hfmn1> [pic.twitter.com/Q4JhTawunb](https://pic.twitter.com/Q4JhTawunb) <sup>[3]</sup>

— Education (@EDU\_GovNL) February 16, 2021

He said that is an option that could be looked at, but anything the department does is in consultation with and based on the guidance of Public Health.

“One of the concerns was not introducing new children into existing cohorts,” he said.

That is also why operators can only take children of existing clients even though they may not be full.

If an operator finds themselves in a situation where they have no children attend, the department can look into it and seek guidance from Public Health on whether or not they could accept new children, Osborne said.

**Region:** Newfoundland <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** COVID-19 <sup>[5]</sup>

economic recovery <sup>[6]</sup>

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