

Child-care workers in hot spots say they should be vaccinated alongside teachers ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Early childhood educators and advocates are calling on the province to include child-care workers with teachers and other school staff in hard-hit areas who will soon be eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

"They have the same level of risk," said Carolyn Ferns, spokesperson for the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "The only thing that's different is the employer. So clearly they need to be included in the prioritization for vaccination."

On Wednesday, Ontario's government announced that beginning next week anyone across the province who provides direct support to special needs students, as well as "all education workers" in select postal codes in Toronto and Peel, will be eligible to register for vaccination.

Education Minister Stephen Lecce said the government was "determined to ensure every single educator ... everyone who is involved in the delivery of care of our kids in our schools, that they get access to this vaccine."

But the announcement left many in the child-care sector wondering about those who care for children outside of schools.

The Ministry of Education confirmed Thursday afternoon that the new vaccine prioritization for education workers in so-called "hot spots" only applies to those who work in schools with school-aged children. (Anyone 18 or older who lives in one of the "hot spots" is eligible, however.)

"Our commitment is to get every single child-care worker in Ontario vaccinated as soon as supply becomes available," Lecce said Thursday. "It is critical to their safety and we recognize that. As soon as we get more supply, I assure them we will get them into their arms as we want to keep them safe."

Alana Powell, executive co-ordinator of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, said it's "inequitable and unjust" for the province not to include child-care workers in its new vaccine prioritization.

"If we want to keep schools and child care open then it's important that early-childhood educators and child-care workers are vaccinated as soon as possible," she said.

More than two-thirds of early-childhood educators in Ontario work outside of schools, according to data from the profession's college.

COVID-19 cases in child-care settings have more than doubled in the past two weeks. The five-day moving average was 106 cases as of Tuesday, up from 48 on March 24, according to provincial data. Children account for 52 per cent of the cases, with staff making up the rest.

Powell said child-care workers, some of whom work with unmasked children who often need care that requires close contact, are concerned for their health, particularly with the increased transmissibility of new variants. "They're expressing that they're scared to go to work."

Powell added that child-care workers are tired of being "excluded" and "forgotten" by the province.

"We really need to do something now to address the needs of the workforce," she said. "They have continued to remain open even through lockdowns and school closures and we have to make sure they're protected."

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: COVID-19 ^[4]

child care workforce ^[5]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/04/child-care-workers-hot-spots-say-they-should-be-vaccinated-alongside> [2] <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2021/04/08/child-care-workers-in-hot-spots-say-they-should-be-vaccinated-alongside-teachers.html> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9040> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care-workforce>