

'This makes a big difference': Province expands vaccine eligibility to child-care workers ^[1]

Author: Kennedy, Brendan

Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 27 Apr 2021

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Child-care workers in licensed child-care settings across the province will be eligible to book a COVID-19 vaccine appointment starting Thursday, Ontario's ministries of health and education announced Tuesday morning.

The announcement comes nearly three weeks after the province expanded vaccine eligibility to include teachers and other education workers, but not those working in child care, leading to protests within the sector.

The province said eligibility will be expanded to child-care workers in unlicensed child-care settings "in the coming weeks."

Alana Powell, executive co-ordinator of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, said it's unfortunate child-care workers were not prioritized alongside teachers earlier this month. "But at least for so many people who wouldn't have been able to get the vaccine in the next coming weeks, this makes a big difference for them and that really matters right now."

The number of COVID cases within child-care settings has surged in the province's third wave, with more than half of the total infections within the sector recorded since March 1. Daily case counts that were in the single digits through the pandemic's first and second waves have regularly been above 20 for more than a month, reaching a peak of 49 cases on April 20.

Earlier this month Dr. Janine McCready, an infectious disease specialist at Michael Garron Hospital, told the Star's Jennifer Yang it had reached the point that if parents could keep their kids home from daycare, "now is the time."

Powell said there has been "growing fear and frustration" among child-care workers as cases have risen, adding that it has become "increasingly hard for them to keep going."

On April 19, staff at a daycare in Waterloo walked off the job to protest the fact they were not given access to the vaccine alongside teachers.

Powell said Tuesday's announcement would help "maybe stave off a breaking point that we could have been reaching."

Stephen Lecce, Ontario's minister of education, previously said child-care workers were not included alongside teachers and other education workers due to a lack of vaccine supply.

"Ontario's child-care workers are making a difference and supporting working parents at this critical time," he said in a news release about the expanded eligibility. "Our child-care centres are safe and the expansion of vaccines will further protect children and staff."

Starting Thursday, child-care workers will be able to book a vaccine appointment through the Provincial Vaccine Booking Line at 1-833-943-3900 or through their local public health unit, the province said. Eligible workers will receive a letter from their employer and that letter must be taken to the vaccine appointment.

The inclusion of child-care workers for priority vaccine access comes as the province also expands eligibility at mass vaccination sites to those 45 and older living in one of 114 high-risk neighbourhoods. People 40 and older were already eligible to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine at participating pharmacies.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: COVID-19 ^[4]

child care workforce ^[5]

health and safety ^[6]

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/04/%E2%80%98-makes-big-difference%E2%80%99-province-expands-vaccine-eligibility-child> [2] <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2021/04/27/this-makes-a-big-difference-province-expands-vaccine-eligibility-to-child-care-workers.html> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9040> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care-workforce> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/health-and-safety>