

Ontario child-care centres stressing over no access to PCR tests

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EXCERPTS

Many child-care centre operators say they're feeling stressed out about opening on Monday. Up until last week, a majority required a negative PCR test for a child to return after symptoms, such as a runny nose.

But under Ontario's new testing regime, those tests are no longer available to children or workers.

"It's extremely stressful for this government and this ministry to put this on us and families at the very last minute," says Amy O'Neil, the executive director of Treetop Children's Centre.

As of Dec. 31st, lab testing for COVID is only available for specific groups who are considered high-risk individuals and those who work in high-risk settings.

O'Neil says child-care centres should be on that list as well.

"Let's not forget we are working with an unvaccinated population. Our staff has not had the opportunity to have their third vaccination. We are essentially working in a situation that is very unsafe."

The impact will also be felt by many families. O'Neil says if a child has a runny nose, cough or diarrhea – which is very common in young children without COVID – that child will be sent home for at least five days. Their siblings and parents will also have to self-isolate while continuing to have to pay for child-care fees.

"We will also be on a pendulum of having not enough staff and potentially we may need to close programs because we won't have enough staff to operate the programs. This will impact families because they won't have child-care," O'Neil adds.

Opposition parties are calling on the provincial government to reverse its decision when it comes to testing and COVID tracing in schools and child-care centres. NDP child-care critic Bhutla Karpoche says parents will be heavily impacted by the change.

"They're kind of stuck because they need to send their little kids back to child-care and go back to work but not being able to book a test," says Karpoche.

"And now also to know the government will not be providing information on outbreaks is really worrisome."

O'Neil says the situation would be manageable if child-care centres were provided with rapid antigen tests by the Ministry of Education.

Region: Ontario [3]

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