

# Illegal daycare stays open [CA-ON]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

An apparently illegal daycare in Vaughan where children play near an unfenced swimming pool continues to operate despite numerous complaints filed with provincial and municipal authorities.

The Children and Youth Services ministry and its minister Mary Anne Chambers are looking into the case. Chambers, who found out about it after the Star began asking questions, wants the daycare "shut down as soon as possible."

The woman who runs an unlicensed nursery, Klara Solodar, cares for between eight and 12 pre-schoolers in her home at 30 Joshua Court near Yonge and Clark Sts. in Thornhill.

Neighbours and the local councillor say it is riddled with safety hazards posing a threat to children.

Solodar's daycare is one of perhaps hundreds of illegal operations in Ontario caring for children under the noses of authorities.

No one knows how many there are. But City of Toronto property inspection records, obtained by the Star under freedom of information legislation, show the problem is widespread across Toronto.

Solodar would not speak to the Star, and reacted angrily when approached about eight children seen in her care by reporters on Thursday, ripping camera equipment from one and biting another.

The next day an unannounced ministry inspection found only five children in the home &em; the legal limit for home daycares. The ministry said it will be back.

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Complaints have been made to government officials by local authorities and neighbours.

"I'm really concerned about the kids in that house," said Councillor Alan Shefman. "The ministry has the legislative responsibility. If I did, I would have closed it down in two minutes."

Shefman said he sent a health inspector, a fire official and a building inspector to the property in the past week. The city has done all it can do, he said.

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This story is part of an ongoing investigation by the Star into daycares in Ontario. Previously, the Star reported on problems with licensed daycares. By law, a facility serving more than five children must be licensed under the Day Nurseries Act, which sets quality standards such as staff-to-child ratios, staff qualifications, safety protocols and nutrition requirements.

When the Star watched the home on two consecutive days, reporters saw eight children cared for between 7:30 a.m. and 6 p.m.

The Star observed Solodar looking after at least eight children on both Wednesday and again on Thursday. The children were dropped off in a variety of vehicles, including luxury SUVs, a school bus and a tow truck.

On at least two occasions on Wednesday, Solodar left children unattended in the back yard for a few minutes as she went into the house or to greet arriving parents. In one case, a girl who appeared to be about 10 was left to watch them.

There is no gate preventing a child from leaving the back yard deck and running out to the pool area.

"I couldn't live with myself if anything happens to any of those kids and I didn't do anything about it," said Duane Margolese, a neighbour who has filed complaints with the city and province. "The ministry told me because she is not licensed, it is not their responsibility. They're basically saying that unless someone is seriously hurt or drowns, there is not much they can do."

After learning of the Star's investigation, officials with the Ministry of Community and Social Services finally visited the daycare Friday, accompanied by a Russian-speaking interpreter. The two inspectors left a half hour later, telling neighbours there was nothing they could

do because they found only five children inside at the time of the inspection.

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The Star contacted [Children and Youth Services Minister] Mary Anne Chambers after she was briefed by her staff. Officials have no way of knowing how many illegal daycares are in the province, she said.

"Intuitively, yes, I know there are illegal operators. But do I know who they are or where they are? No, not until I get a complaint."

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** quality <sup>[4]</sup>

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