

# Tired of the the kids? Try 24-hour daycare [CA-QC]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Montreal -- In a day of 24-hour banking, 24-hour shopping and 24-hour gambling, Quebec has come up with a plan to offer the next logical service: 24-hour daycare.

Answering demand from shift workers such as nurses, casino workers and call-centre operators, the provincial government will begin experimenting next week with round-the-clock, seven-day-a-week child-care.

In another innovative twist on Quebec's trailblazing \$5-a-day daycare, the province is launching trial programs that will allow boys and girls to arrive at daycare with their teddy bears and pyjamas, and have professional caregivers tuck them into bed.

"Quebec's family policy for daycare is always evolving," said Nicole Léger, provincial Minister of Families and Children. "We're very innovative, and we always have to readjust supply and demand to meet the needs of parents."

The program will run for a year to 15 months in 10 non-profit daycare centres, mostly in the Montreal and Quebec City areas, and will be evaluated at the end of the trial, Ms. Léger said. At a cost to parents of \$5 a shift, it is believed to be Canada's first comprehensive policy of offering state-subsidized daycare around the clock.

The initiative is being praised for responding to working parents. But it is also raising concern that daycare centres will become "parking lots" for tots and will allow work to encroach further on family life.

One woman wrote in a recent letter to the editor that Quebec's 24-hour daycares marked a victory for capitalism, not feminism.

Mario Régis, head of the association of non-profit daycare centres in Montreal, said the government initiative is a logical response to the growing number of parents who work unconventional shifts. "Not everyone works 9 to 5. We have to recognize the evolution of the job market in the past 15 years."

He said globalization and the burgeoning service economy are putting tremendous pressure on working parents, and he hoped the new extended-hour daycares didn't let employers take advantage of staff.

"How far do we want to go?" Mr. Régis asked. "We have to avoid a situation of abuse, where we return to the days of boarding schools. . . . The children need their parents above all."

The daycares will be open extended hours, including late at night or early in the morning, and some will be open 24 hours a day. The service will be operated from daycare centres that already offer conventional daytime hours, some of which are run on company premises or in hospitals.

Quebec already has a handful of centres that are testing flexible hours. Le Petit Train in Lévis near Quebec City welcomes 24 children on an average weekend, about seven of whom sleep overnight.

Two educators stay with the children all night -- a much higher adult-to-child ratio than during the day -- and are required to stay awake. The children bring their own blanket and stuffed animals.

"The children adapt very well," director Sylvie Guay said. "And parents are very pleased. They know they can leave their children in safety; they don't have to keep searching for babysitters, or worry if a babysitter gets sick."

While the vast majority of parents -- many are single mothers -- drop off their children because they have to work, one woman recently dropped off her child because she had an upset stomach and was too ill to look after the child.

And the daycare was busiest this summer on July 1, when some parents had to work on the holiday, and others were moving because it's Quebec's moving day.

"Moving with a child isn't easy," Ms. Guay said.

The government says that not all parents are ready for overnight daycare for their child. According to a government study, 4 per cent of Quebec parents say they need daycare for non-conventional hours. However, the same study said only 0.4 per cent were prepared to leave

their children in centres overnight.

Quebec's universal, affordable daycare system has drawn attention across Canada and the United States, where child-care can cost \$1,200 (U.S.) a month per child. Beginning next week, it will offer every Quebec child below the age of 5 daycare in regulated centres for \$5 a day.

The program has become so popular that waiting lists have mushroomed and panicky parents place their children on several lists. Since 1997, the province has opened 15,000 subsidized places a year. But the 120,000 places created so far still can't keep pace with demand. Quebec plans to have 200,000 new spaces by 2005. The cost of the trial extended-hours program is \$500,000.

-Reprinted from The Globe and Mail

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

**Tags:** accessibility <sup>[3]</sup>

full-day early learning <sup>[4]</sup>

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