

Baby dies at unregulated Markham daycare, sparking police probe ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Police and the province's chief coroner are investigating the death of a 9-month-old baby in an unregulated home daycare in Markham - the third death of a child in such a facility this year.

The baby girl was reportedly not breathing when emergency responders were called to the residence on The Meadows Ave. near Country Glen Rd. Wednesday around 5 p.m.

She was rushed to nearby Markham Stouffville Hospital where efforts to revive her were unsuccessful, said Det. James Ward of York Regional Police's Criminal Investigation Bureau.

It is not known how the baby died and there is no evidence the daycare is at fault.

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A spokesperson for Education Minister Liz Sandals said a preliminary review of ministry records found no complaints against the home.

"I can confirm that the Ministry of Education is conducting an investigation under the Day Nurseries Act into this case, as is the standard process in such circumstances, and that staff were on-site this morning," said Lauren Ramey.

In July, 2-year-old Eva Ravikovitch died in an illegal home daycare in Vaughan where at least 35 children were registered for care.

Earlier that month, 2-year-old Alison Tucker died in a North York condo where she had been receiving care for the past year.

The deaths have prompted calls for more government oversight of unlicensed home daycares. Currently, anyone can operate an unregulated home daycare as long as the facility has no more than five children under age 10, in addition to the operator's own kids.

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Education Minister Liz Sandals expressed condolences to the family Friday.

"I learned yesterday of the tragic death of a child who had been receiving home child care in York Region," she said in a statement. "My heart goes out to the family and loved ones of the child at this devastating and unimaginable time."

Ministry officials are working with police and the coroner's office as their investigation continues, she said.

Sandals' ministry is reviewing provincial legislation governing licensed daycare, to better reflect changes in the sector as 4- and 5-year-olds move to full-day kindergarten.

As a result of last summer's daycare deaths in two Toronto-area unregulated homes, the ministry is also considering changes for unlicensed care.

Regulated home daycare operators are permitted a maximum of five children under age 10, including their own. Among those children, they can only have two under age 2 and three under age 3.

They must be affiliated with a licensed home daycare agency that visits a minimum of every three months to provide support and ensure the premises comply with strict health and safety measures. Most agencies require their caregivers to undergo police checks and have first aid and CPR training.

Sandals has said she will be introducing changes to the Day Nurseries Act this fall, which, if approved, would expand the authority of the ministry to address complaints related to unlicensed child-care providers.

Since last summer's deaths, the ministry has established a dedicated enforcement team to investigate complaints about non-compliant unlicensed providers. It has also appointed a new assistant deputy minister responsible for unlicensed child care.

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care says provincial laws should be changed to ensure all home daycare providers are overseen by licensed agencies.

"One death is too many," said coalition spokesperson Andrea Calver. "But now we have three. We need to make sure that something like

this doesn't happen again. It's not enough to take people's word that they are providing adequate care."

NDP Children and Youth Critic Monique Taylor urged the government to act.

Wednesday's "tragic death of a 9-month-old child in an unregulated daycare in Markham is another sad reminder of why the province needs to do more to ensure our children's safety in home-based daycares in Ontario," she said in a statement.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

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