

# No one is tracking unregulated daycare deaths in Ontario<sup>[1]</sup>

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EXCERPTS

No one at Queen's Park is keeping track of how often babies die in unregulated child care in Ontario.

Four babies have died in seven months in unregulated home daycares in the Toronto area, but neither the provincial coroner's office nor the provincial Education ministry could say Thursday if this is unusual.

The coroner is still investigating the cause of death in three of the cases. Police have charged a caregiver with manslaughter in a case from 2013.

For investigative reasons, the exact cause of death in that case has been kept secret.

The coroner's office investigates all child deaths that are not due to natural causes as well as any death of a child involved with Children's Aid.

But coroner's reports have no specific coding that allows the office to track how often, or under what circumstances, children die in daycare, said Dr. Roger Skinner, regional supervising coroner for the Toronto West region.

"Certainly the reports of four deaths in relatively quick succession in an unlicensed daycare setting is of concern," he said Thursday.

"In order to comment on a trend, we've got to know what the history has been and I can't tell you that right now," he added. "It's certainly something we have a heightened awareness of and that we're following. But we're not, at this point, collecting the data on it." Given the public interest over the past year, the office might consider tracking daycare deaths in the future, Skinner said.

Currently, the coroner reports deaths in both licensed and unlicensed care to the Education ministry, which is responsible for child care.

"It would be our practice either directly or through the police to notify the respective ministry," Skinner said.

Education Minister Liz Sandals said the government treats child deaths "extremely seriously." But ministry staff were unable to say whether the recent tragedies are an anomaly.

"As part of our plan to modernize the child care system, we will continue to work on better interagency cooperation including the greater exchange of information between agencies like the Coroner's Office, Public Health and the Ministry of Education regarding serious incidents in a child care setting," Sandals said in a statement Thursday night.

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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