

Background check violations at N.S. daycares 'staggering' ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The Nova Scotia government is cracking down on child-care centres without updated background checks on staff members.

Over the past two years, 465 daycare workers have violated requirements for initial or renewed background checks.

"I could not believe it. I thought this number is staggering," said Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Karen Casey.

Those who work at the approximately 400 regulated daycares in Nova Scotia are required to have a criminal check as well as a child abuse registry check. The latter must be renewed every three years.

Effective immediately, any worker without a check will not be allowed to work with children unless they are supervised.

A new regulation this fall will also give the minister the authority to bar staff members from working if they do not have up-to-date child abuse registry and criminal background checks in place

At least five regulated child-care centres were in violation at the time of report. As of Thursday afternoon, only three child-care centres remained in violation.

Backlog at child abuse register office

A Bungalo' Fun Learning Centre in Truro has been in business for five years without a single violation until this week when the owner discovered her own renewal had slipped through the cracks.

"I was shocked and I was disappointed. I made something lapse because we really want our centre, and I'm sure everybody else does too, to be a place that parents can trust their child to come to," said Angela Fitzgerald.

She said she requires staff to have the checks in before they can work. Her issue was with renewing the child abuse check and says the violation was rectified within days.

Dawn MacFarlane with the Wee Care Developmental Centre in Halifax says her centre's outstanding violation happened while they waited for renewals. She requires all staff have the background checks before they start working.

The operator of the Peter Pan Day Care Centre in Sydney says she's mailed in her renewed check to the department.

St. Joseph's Children's Centre had a violation at the time of the report but has since complied.

The other outstanding violation is at Kids & Co. Ltd. Dartmouth.

The minister says there was a backlog at the office of the child abuse register, but that has since been cleared.

Those in violation have 30 days to update the missing background check.

Casey says that makes her uneasy.

"My concern is during that 30 days there could still be children who are exposed to someone who may not or has not passed child abuse or criminal check," she said.

Fitzgerald and other daycare operators contacted by CBC News say they support the minister's efforts.

"I'm for the inspections and regulations. If it wasn't for those, I'm sure there'd be child-care centres that maybe would be not following them the way they should be," she said.

"As a parent myself I want to make sure I'm sending my child to a licensed facility who is being regulated."

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

Tags: legislation and regulation ^[4]

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