

# Auditor general raps Liberal government for tardy daycare inspections <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** Toronto Star

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 10 Dec 2014

## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

It reads like a tragedy-in-waiting for busy parents with kids in daycare.

Auditor general Bonnie Lysyk's report says the Ministry of Education needs to beef up inspections and enforcement of rules "to ensure that children are safe" - even in licensed centres.

Alarmingly, Lysyk found more than 29,000 "serious occurrences" at licensed child care operators and private home daycare agencies from Jan. 1, 2009 to last May 31, a period of over four years.

Those incidents include injuries, abuse, fires or missing children, and physical or safety threats on the premises.

Despite such frequent incidents, inspections are "not conducted on a timely basis," Lysyk warned.

She cited the example of one unnamed centre dubbed "high risk" that had not been inspected since November 2012 despite a slew of breaches such as lack of child supervision, improper food storage and failing to keep knives and harmful cleaning products away from kids.

"We think there should be more inspections (of) high-risk operators," Lysyk urged, offering some cautionary words for moms and dads worried about where to put their children while at work or school.

"As a parent, I think all of us should do our due diligence in ensuring that the child care operators that we're entrusting our children to are, in our opinion, good operators," she told reporters.

"There are lots of good child care operators out there but based on our review of the information . . . we think there are also operators that are problematic."

Education Minister Liz Sandals said in a statement the government needs to take "further action" but insisted other measures are already in place to improve oversight.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath accused the Liberals of "letting Ontarians down again" without more inspections urged by Lysyk to make sure violations don't fall through the cracks.

"We are concerned that child care operators are not reporting all serious occurrences. We found that many of these incidents were not being reported to the ministry within the required 24 hours," the auditor said.

More than 80 per cent of high-risk centres were not inspected until after their licenses had expired, she added.

And in the last five years, the ministry had not inspected fully one-third of child care operators before their licenses expired.

Repeated problems were found at a number of child care centres in terms of safety, health and well-being but "remedial enforcement follow-up action" was taken in only 18 cases since 2009, Lysyk found.

The audit discovered that among new daycare operators, there were criminal record checks on file for just 50 per cent of staff with direct access to children.

As well, the government has a bad habit of issuing licenses to centres before all the safety measures and paperwork are complete.

"We think at the time of licensing there should be more work done to ensure that all the requirements . . . are actually in place," Lysyk said.

Sandals said the government has already implemented a "child care licensing system" to collect information on providers and cut the backlog of licensing inspections in half.

The government also recently passed its Child Care Modernization Act, giving the ministry more oversight and enforcement powers.

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

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