

May 19, 2021

Taylor Kociszewski
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Dear Taylor Kociszewski,

Thank you for your feedback on the value of Registered Early Childhood Educators and the sustainability of the child care sector. As the Director of the Programs and Service Integration Branch, I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education.

First and foremost, the ministry acknowledges the efforts of Ontario's early childhood educators and other child care program staff who have been instrumental in helping to keep children safe, families supported, and child care settings healthy places for our children to learn and thrive, particularly during this challenging time.

As you know, to support the parents of school-aged children who may not be able to support their child's learning/care at home, the Ministry of Education has again implemented an emergency child care program for school-aged children, at no cost to eligible parents, while schools are closed for in-person instruction.

Child care will remain open for non-school-aged children (i.e., children 0-4) for the duration of the current public health actions. This includes child care offered in licensed child care centres and in home-based settings (licensed and unlicensed).

Child care workers are eligible to access emergency child care for school aged children and are encouraged to contact their [service system manager](#) for more information.

I recognize these actions are incredibly challenging as child care and early years partners pivot to develop and implement emergency child care for school-aged children, as well as maintain child care for younger children, in order to ensure we are able to meet the unique needs of Ontario's families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to again extend my sincere appreciation for the continued efforts and patience of those working in the early years and child care during this unprecedented time, and their unwavering commitment to serving children and families.

Vaccine Priority for Child Care Staff

Phase Two of the government's [COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Plan](#) is currently underway now until the end of June. Local public health units are responsible for managing and overseeing local distribution and the administration of vaccines within the Phase 2 Framework and in alignment with the [Ethical Framework for COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution](#). Timing of roll-out depends in large part on the supply of vaccines received from the federal government.

Effective Thursday April 29, 2021, child care workers in licensed child care settings are eligible to book an appointment through the Provincial Vaccine Booking Line number at 1-833-943-3900 or directly through public health units that use their own booking system. Child care workers in unlicensed child care settings, who directly provide care for children who are not related to the provider, are also eligible to book vaccination appointments.

Supporting vaccination for eligible child care workers is in addition to recent announcements made to vaccinate individuals at mass immunization, mobile and pop-up clinics in COVID-19 hot spot zones, pharmacies and primary care settings across the province. Individuals can find out if they live in a hot spot community by visiting Ontario's [website](#) for a list of designated postal codes. Visit [How to book a COVID-19 vaccine appointment](#) for more information.

Given how quickly the supply of vaccines to Ontario is changing, you are encouraged to monitor local and provincial information sources, including your local public health unit's [website](#), for more details on local plans and to determine when you may be eligible for vaccination based on other factors.

We remain committed to working with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and sector partners to support the ongoing safety and well-being of child care providers and staff, children, and families as the COVID-19 situation changes.

Staff-Child Ratios

The health and safety measures currently in place are informed by advice from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development and Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health. Based on that advice, child care centres across Ontario are currently permitted to operate at full capacity with the maximum group sizes and ratios outlined in the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*.

The Ministry of Education continues to work with the Ministry of Health and other sector partners on the health and safety restrictions in place and will make updates and amendments as required, based on public health advice. Keeping childcare safe so that it can remain open is critical to the mental health and well-being of children and in supporting working parents in Ontario.

Everyone in the child care sector has worked incredibly hard to put in place strict health and safety measures, including but not limited to:

- Screening every day for COVID-19 symptoms before any individual enters the child care premises (The [COVID-19 School and Child Care Screening Tool](#) is available to assist with symptom screening);
- Practicing good hand hygiene habits throughout the day;
- Practicing physical distancing;
- Wearing a mask and eye protection; and
- Avoiding sharing objects, toys, food, water bottles or other personal items.

Supports for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs)

We recognize that there are many frontline heroes that were not captured by the pandemic pay program, including those workers in congregate care settings or working primarily with vulnerable populations facing inherent challenges where physical distancing is not possible. Ideally, the government would be able to provide pandemic pay to all those who are deserving. Unfortunately, there is a limit to the amount of funding provided by the federal government through our shared agreement and after careful consideration, the government decided not to expand the pandemic pay program beyond those already deemed eligible. Pandemic pay was effective for 16 weeks, from April 24 to August 13, 2020.

To support professionals in the child care and early years sector, the ministry is committed to the continued funding of the Wage Enhancement and Home Child Care Enhancement Grants (HCCEG) to help close the gap between registered early childhood educators (RECEs) working in publicly funded schools and RECEs, child care program staff, and providers working in licensed child care settings. The wage enhancement grant also helps to stabilize licensed child care operators by helping them retain RECEs/child care staff and support greater employment and income security. The Wage Enhancement/HCCEG provides eligible program staff and home child care visitors working in a licensed child care program with a wage enhancement of up to \$2 an hour plus 17.5 per cent in benefits. Under the HCCEG, eligible home child care providers contracted with a licensed child care agency could receive a HCCEG of up to \$20 per day.

Thank you again for sharing your concerns and for your continued advocacy to support the child care and early years sector.

Sincerely,

Bill Dubin

Jill Dubrick
Director, Early Years and Child Care
Programs and Service Integration Branch
Ministry of Education