

**Ministry of Education
Early Years and Child Care Division**

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TO: Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards (CMSMs and DSSABs)

FROM: Phil Graham
Assistant Deputy Minister
Early Years and Child Care Division

DATE: January 28, 2021

SUBJECT: Child Care Updates

Thank you very much for your ongoing efforts and patience as we continue to work through the ever-changing landscape brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Your unwavering commitment and dedication has not gone unnoticed and we cannot thank you enough for your efforts to support the children and families in your communities. The Ministry of Education is committed to keeping you updated as the situation evolves to help you plan for and address the impacts on the early years and child care sector. Today, I am pleased to update you on the return to in-person learning in select regions of the province and associated considerations for early years and child care programs.

Updated Approach on Return to In-Person Learning in Elementary Schools

The Chief Medical Officer of Health has determined that the following Public Health Units (PHU) may return to in-person instruction in schools on Monday, February 1, 2021:

- Eastern Ontario Health Unit
- Middlesex-London Health Unit
- Southwestern Public Health
- Ottawa Public Health

In these PHU regions, emergency child care will end on January 29, 2021, and before/after school programs may resume their usual operations on February 1, 2021, including the charging of parent fees.

In the remaining PHUs where elementary schools continue to be closed for in-person learning by the province, before/after school programs will remain closed (and may not charge parent fees) and targeted emergency child care for school-aged children will continue to operate at no cost to eligible parents.

For reference, the public health units where elementary schools are remaining closed for in-person learning at this time are:

- City of Hamilton Public Health Services
- Lambton Public Health
- Niagara Region Public Health
- Peel Public Health
- Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services
- Toronto Public Health
- Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health
- Windsor-Essex County Health Unit
- York Region Public Health
- Chatham-Kent Health Unit
- Durham Region Health Department
- Brant County Health Unit
- Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit
- Huron Perth Health Unit
- Halton Region Health Department
- Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit

There are no changes with regards to the operation of child care for non-school-aged children (and JK/SK-aged children enrolled in child care immediately prior to December 21, 2020) in any region. These settings remain open and are asked to implement enhanced health and safety recommendations (see below).

Eligibility for Emergency Child Care

Effective January 27, 2021, the government further expanded eligibility for the targeted emergency child care program to include additional workers who are performing critical roles in their communities. This expansion is intended to support workers and their families with child care options at no cost in regions where students continue to learn remotely, and builds on the existing list of eligible workers.

All CMSMs and DSSABs are requested to continue to report on emergency child care for the duration of the time the program is in operation in their region (including both waitlist and attendance data). Reporting information should be submitted by noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays to tpa.edu.EarlyLearning@ontario.ca, copying your Early Years Advisor.

Updated Health and Safety Guidance

Continued adherence to health and safety guidelines and requirements continue to be of utmost importance to keep staff, children and families safe. As per the memo and the addendum shared on January 20, 2021, additional health and safety measures, including masking requirements for Grades 1-3 and outdoors where distancing cannot be maintained, and enhanced screening protocols have been introduced. The revised *Operational Guidance For Child Care During COVID-19 Outbreak v.5* and the *Before and After School Programs, Kindergarten – Grade 6* guidance documents reflecting these additional health and safety measures will be available soon. A summary of changes can be found on page 4 in the Child Care Guidance and page 2 in the Before and After Guidance.

Updates to the guidance documents are based on advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and are intended to represent the minimum recommendations of the Ministry of Education for operating child care.

As always, child care and early years partners may, particularly at the advice or direction of their local PHU, choose to implement additional measures based on local circumstances.

CMSMs/DSSABs, school boards and child care partners are encouraged to work together to implement health and safety protocols where programs are located in schools.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

As a reminder, EarlyON Child and Family Centres must continue to remain closed and may not offer indoor or outdoor in-person programming. EarlyON Centres are strongly encouraged to continue to offer virtual programming during this time.

Once again, thank you for your continued support and collaboration as we work through these challenging times together.

Sincerely,

Phil Graham