



**ECEBC** | early childhood  
educators of BC

March 27, 2020

**To:**

Right Honourable Minister of State for Childcare Katrina Chen;  
Right Honourable Minister of Health Adrian Dix;  
Right Honourable Minister of Children and Family Development Katrine Conroy; and  
Provincial Medical Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry

**Re:** MCFD Covid-19 Child Care Update: March 27, 2020

We appreciate the government's recent updates and clarifications to the Early Care and Learning (ECL) sector regarding the provision of emergency childcare during this pandemic. We offer this letter in response to the ministry's request for feedback. A number of serious concerns and questions remain unanswered:

- What constitutes emergency childcare?
- How is emergency childcare similar and different from childcare during non-pandemic times?
- Who accesses emergency childcare?

Furthermore, messaging within government documents that aim to support Early Childhood Educators has been contradictory. We advocate for integrated and collaborative consultation with Early Years professionals to reduce the disparity that exists between current pandemic-driven health and safety recommendations, and the provision of ethical and quality childcare practice as directed by BC Childcare Licensing regulations.

In the absence of definitive and coordinated leadership from the government, front-line educators and licensees have been burdened with the responsibilities of making ad hoc decisions and providing a patchwork of care. In order to support our essential service workers with emergency childcare, we require the same planning and communications afforded to the Ministry of Education and its workforce.

"The Ministry of Education has been informing School Districts that there is no expectation to have a solution in place at the end of spring break. We need to plan carefully while continually considering the health and safety in our schools and throughout the District. In addition, we need to develop a sustainable plan and learning model in case the status quo continues for many weeks." Letter from School District #61 (Victoria).

We support The Canadian Childcare Federation, and CEO Don Giesbrecht's call on provinces to take a unified approach during the outbreak. In their letter dated March 19th, 2020 addressed to Ministers Hussen, Freeland and Morneau, "Our ELCC sector needs immediate and coordinated federal/provincial/territorial government planning and funding to survive

through this time—and to be there when our society rebuilds and gets Canadian families back to work. It is essential that the sector be supported both currently and into the future”.

The following are recommendations from CCCF and Childcare Now:

1. Close all licensed childcare for regular use until social distancing is no longer necessary;
2. Continue to pay all childcare staff as if they are still working;
3. For parents required to work or those working in essential services, broadly defined, establish free age-appropriate emergency childcare programs for children 0-12 years in existing centres, licensed family child care or schools during the closed period;
4. Ensure that parent fees are suspended during closings;
5. Maintain all government funding to service providers during closings and provide additional funding to compensate for the loss of income from parent fees and/or parent subsidies

What constitutes emergency childcare?

Emergency childcare is defined as the provision of care during a declared state of emergency.

In these times, we agree with government, that the access to emergency childcare should “prioritize(s) those children whose parents are employed as front-line workers in direct support to public health and health services, social services, law enforcement, first responders and emergency response” if they can do so while continuing to follow the advice of the Provincial Health Officer related to the health and safety of staff and the children and families they serve (MCFD Q&A for the Child Care Sector, Q18).

Essential Services Defined:

- The full list can be found in the backgrounder “List of essential services in B.C. during COVID-19 pandemic”
- Finally, if there are any available spaces providers may, but are not required to, offer those spaces to parents in other fields of work who are unable to care for their children at home during this time.

How is such care similar and different from childcare in non-pandemic times?

It is imperative that, even in this time of crisis, the social and emotional well-being of children continues to be at the core of our practice. Social distancing between the educator and child is not appropriate, or even possible, while engaged in the everyday caring practices of guiding, comforting, feeding, toileting, or napping.

Who provides emergency childcare?

Temporary Emergency Funding is only available for licensed family, group, and multi-age child care providers that are in receipt of base CCOF. This funding does not apply to registered license-not-required, license-not-required and in-child's-own-home care types. (MCFD Q&A for the Child Care Sector, Q 7).

In line with Dr. Bonnie Henry's recommendation that children are best cared for at home during this pandemic, we continue to call for the temporary closure of all childcare centres, followed by a coordinated, planned response for the provision of emergency childcare. Below we have compiled a list of recommendations based on current feedback, concerns and available information. This list may be updated as new information arises.

## **Considerations for Providing Group Child Care during a Pandemic**

### **Recommendations for Practice**

- Provide an assigned primary caregiver to each child: this will not only support and maintain rapid building of relationships, but also minimize cross contamination during care routines such as feeding, toileting etc.
- Develop systems for provision of toys and materials such as: a bin of designated markers, scissors, glue bottle for each child; puzzles used once and then taken out of rotation for cleaning; elimination of sensory bins/tables; sensory materials such as playdough to be child specific (stored in their own container); elimination of shared small manipulatives such as Lego, or provide child specific manipulatives; dress-up clothes (fabrics that are fully washable) offer less possibility of containing the virus than plastic or metal materials, and could be provided if laundry facilities are available.
- Sanitation/hygiene practices should adhere to communicable disease 'outbreak mode protocols'.
- Develop systems for the cleaning of both indoor and outdoor (bicycles, balls, mud kitchen dishes, etc.) materials.
- Develop specific plans for children requiring additional support.
- Increase children's opportunity for outside play, while ensuring that children do not access playground structures.
- Clarification is needed from the Ministry of Health/BCCDC regarding preparation and serving of food: is it safer for families to send packed snacks and lunches, or for the centre to prepare and serve meals for all children?
- Availability of on-site laundry facilities.
- Availability of on-site industrial dishwashers.

### **Recommendations for Policy**

- Ensure staff are site specific, not working in multiple settings (as with Health Care workers in seniors' homes).
- Ensure children are attending one centre, not attending at multiple locations.
- Ensure a plan is in place for replacement of educators who become sick during their shift. An additional educator should be on site to ensure that ratios are met in accordance to the Child Care Regulations if an educator needs to leave due to illness.
- Clarification is needed from BCCDC regarding protocols for self-isolation of colleagues and children if a child or worker becomes sick with COVID-19.
- Responsive adherence to wellness policies and 'pick up if sick' policies that are currently in place.
- Assure families that guiding and caring policies remain firmly in place ie. an infant will be held and physically comforted.

## **Ratio**

- We recommend lower ratios such as 1:4 for 3-5 years, 1:2 for under 3's PLUS an additional staff person to allow for potential isolation of a sick child, replacement staff, and to support enhanced cleaning practices.

## **Physical Requirements of a Facility**

- Space requirements that are based on an allowance of 6 ft of distance around *everyone in* the centre (whereas licensing space requirements are calculated based only on children occupancy).
- Use the largest program spaces available, rather than physically small centres.
- Rotate classroom spaces so that children can be cared for in one room, while the room used the previous day is deep cleaned.
- In our licensing requirements (Section 22), programs are expected to have plans in place to address ANY emergency; this plan should be referred to at current time,

## **Recommendations for Resources**

### **Access to sanitation supplies**

- Develop a process that ensures the availability and ongoing accessibility of supplies for purchase.
- Monitor daily the amount of cleaning and disinfecting supplies, gloves, toilet paper, hand soap, tissue, to ensure the centre is able to continue operating.
- Follow the proper and appropriate use of masks: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>
- Masks are not recommended for children. For young children in particular, masks can be irritating and may lead to increased touching of the face and eyes. <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/common-questions>
- Request that staff of emergency childcare settings have access to testing in order to prevent and identify outbreak clusters.

### **Food security**

- Develop a process that ensures the availability to meet Canada Food Guidelines especially for those centres located in rural and remote communities that serve economically vulnerable families as required by the CCLR Section 48.

### **Consideration of vulnerable families**

- Children with additional support needs:
  - Access to extra staffing support required to provide shared and/or direct adult support.
  - Access to Supported Child Development or Early Intervention Services consultation support for the purpose of learning about previous care plans or to develop care plans and strategies for individual children unique to providing care during pandemic conditions.

- Children with families at risk:

*It may also be necessary to provide care to vulnerable families during this pandemic crisis. The following should be available or considered:*

- Access to family support team.
- Continued provision of food and supportive resources.
- Keep routines, staffing and environment as consistent as possible

### **Recommendations for Funding**

- Dedicated increased wages for all educators working in emergency childcare programs.
- Accountability for centres receiving 7X child care operating funds to ensure staff are paid above regular rate.
- Additional paid training for staff re: trauma (children) and self-care (mental well-being and personal safety (staff)).
- Official government documentation made available for centres in order to make claims on their business insurance due to interruption of services.

ECEBC and the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) would like to emphasize that the above recommendations are specific '**Considerations for Providing Group Child Care during a Pandemic**'. Early childhood professionals recognize the importance of 'maintaining familiar activities and routines' as suggested in the COVID 19: Public Health Guidance for Childcare Settings. Early Childhood Educators can, and will, skillfully encourage physical distancing between children, in *significantly* modified early learning experiences. We firmly support our essential service providers by contributing to an emergency childcare response that considers and addresses the very real concerns of our colleagues and to do our part in 'planking the curve.'

*The Early Childhood Educators of BC envisions a society where early childhood educators thrive in a supportive community that values childhood and education.*

*Sincerely,*

*Violet Jessen-ECEBC Chair*

*Karen Isaac- BCACCS Executive Director*

*Emily Gawlick- ECEBC Executive Director*