

# Ministry of Children and Family Development

## COVID-19 Questions and Answers for the Child Care Sector

Updated: March 24, 2020

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### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

#### **Q1. Why isn't government shutting down child care?**

- We are continuing to take direction from trusted public health officials, specifically Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.'s Provincial Health Officer.
- Dr. Henry has advised all parents who can, should care for their children at home. She also recognized that while some facilities may close, child care services can and must be provided in a safe manner for those families whose parents work in critical roles.
- Dr. Henry continues to maintain that child care centres can safely care for children if they are following the prescribed health protocols, and that fewer children at child care centres will reduce the burden on providers and ECEs.
- The Ministry of Health is developing a detailed guideline to inform child care operators, Early Childhood Educators and licensing officers on implementation of best practice, which will be circulated to child care providers shortly.

#### **Q2. Why were schools in B.C. closed but not child care?**

- Child care remains a critical service for many parents who must continue to work – including those providing essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Dr. Henry has stated that child care is necessary to ensure essential service workers are able to support community efforts to battle the pandemic.
- School Districts and Independent School Authorities are also developing plans to maintain some level of service for children of essential service workers – as we are doing with supports for child care centers who remain open.
- Across government, we are putting measures in place to ensure that we have appropriate, safe care for kids who need it.
- Providers located on school grounds should contact their local school principal, or School District to discuss options regarding providing care on school grounds
- School districts are working on a strategy to support essential workers with care for school-aged children. School Districts will be in contact with families once their plans are complete.
- School age facilities are also eligible for the emergency temporary funding and should be contacting their school principal and/or School District to discuss how best to meet community need.

**Q3. Why is child care in B.C. not closed when most every other province and territory in Canada has closed their child care programs?**

- Each province is responsible for following the advice of their Provincial Public Health Officer.
- In B.C., Dr. Bonnie Henry, provincial health officer, has advised all parents who can, should care for their children at home.
- She also recognized that while some centres may close, child care services can and must be provided in a safe manner for those families whose parents work in critical roles.

**Q4. How will government help essential service workers find child care when so many centres are closing?**

- The ministry is exploring ways to get this critical information out to parents to help them find open child care centres with spaces.

## CHILDCARE BC FUNDING

**Q5. Will funding be available to providers so they can remain financially viable during COVID-19?**

- Yes, the ministry will provide temporary emergency funding to licensed child care centres that remain open, so they can continue operating – even with reduced enrolment. Licensed centres that close will also receive support for fixed operating costs, like rent or lease payments.
- This emergency funding is optional – if licensed providers would prefer to remain on their current funding (CCOF, CCFRI, ECE-WE, etc., they also have that option).
- **Licensed providers who are open and operating** can receive temporary emergency funding to cover up to approximately 75% of their operating costs if they agree to:
  - not charge fees to parents that choose to withdraw their child temporarily due to COVID-19 related issues or concerns;
  - reserve a space once the pandemic passes for families who withdraw their child due to COVID-19 related concerns;
  - make every reasonable effort to provide an inclusive and supportive environment for all children, including children with extra support needs;
  - make every reasonable effort (if safe to do so) to provide care in response to community need. This may include adjusting days/hours of operations or relocating to another location if necessary; and
  - notify the Ministry as soon as possible if they need or decide to close.
- Providers who are open and operating will continue to be eligible for the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI) and/or the Early Childhood Educator Wage Enhancement (ECE-WE). In addition, families accessing care from these providers may continue to access the Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB).

- **Providers who close temporarily due to COVID-19** can receive temporary emergency funding to cover up to approximately 20% of their operating costs, if they agree to:
  - not charge parent fees while closed;
  - reserve a space for families whose children were enrolled at the time of closure, so they can access that space again once the pandemic passes (provided their child has not aged out of care).
- This will help child care facilities meet their fixed costs, like rent/lease, so that they can re-open when they are able and offer employment to their staff and ECEs.
- Providers who are closed are not eligible for the CCFRI or the ECE-WE. In addition, families will not be able to access ACCB if facilities are closed.

**Q6. How much funding is available?**

- Licensed providers who are open and operating can receive emergency funding at a rate of 7 times their average monthly CCOF base funding.
- Licensed providers who close temporarily due to COVID-19 can receive emergency funding at a rate of 2 times their average monthly CCOF base funding.

**Q7. Does temporary emergency funding apply to all child care providers?**

- 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. Licensed providers that aren't accessing base CCOF are encouraged to apply.

**Q8. Will I receive support if I have not yet been approved for CCOF renewal?**

- Providers must have an active Funding Agreement with CCOF to be eligible for temporary emergency funding.
- If a facility has not yet applied/enrolled in base CCOF – they should contact the Ministry to request a Program Confirmation Form to assess their eligibility.

**Q9. Will I have to pay back funds that I receive through this emergency funding?**

- We want to make accessing emergency temporary funding as easy as possible for providers.
- If your facility chooses to remain open and accesses the higher rate of emergency funding, but then needs to close, you will not be required to pay back funds to the Ministry; however, if your facility closed before the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, your facility should refund parents for at least half of their regular monthly fee.
- If your facility closed on or after the 15<sup>th</sup>, you can choose whether to refund parent fees.
- In both cases, your facility will be reduced to the lower level of emergency funding effective the 1<sup>st</sup> of the next month (e.g. if a facility closes in April, they will receive the lower rate of emergency funding in May).

**Q10. I've already collected monthly fees from families for April, but I'm reading that I can't charge fees for closures or vacancies if I want to access this emergency funding. What should I do?**

- If you're planning to keep your facility open, you can continue to charge fees as usual from all families that are accessing care.
- Families that choose to temporarily withdraw their child and notify the facility before the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month should receive either a partial refund (e.g. 50% of their regular monthly fee) or a future credit (at the provider's discretion).
- Families that choose to temporarily withdraw their child and notify the facility on or after the 15<sup>th</sup> don't have to receive a refund/credit for that month; however, the facility must not charge them any fee for the following month if they remain absent.

**Q11. Will child care centres still receive ECE-WE?**

- Licensed child care centres that remain open will continue to receive Early Childhood Educator Wage Enhancements (ECE-WE) for their front-line, eligible staff.
- We are also continuing with our previously announced intention to bring the total Early Childhood Educator Wage Enhancement to \$2 per hour, effective April 1, 2020.
- If a child care centre closes, they will not receive the ECE-WE; however, they will be able to receive temporary emergency funding to help them meet their fixed costs, like rent/lease, so that they are able to reopen once the pandemic passes and offer employment to their staff and ECEs, so long as they agree not to charge parent fees for the period of closure.

**Q12. Will parents who must self-isolate with their children lose their Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB) funding?**

- Under current regulations, a family receiving ACCB can be absent for up to two weeks in any calendar month due to sickness or vacation and remain eligible for their regular benefit.
- This 2-week maximum would include absences due to self-isolation due to COVID-19.
- If a family is absent for longer than the 14-day maximum, their ACCB will be adjusted according to the Child Care Subsidy Regulation.
- If a child temporarily withdraws due to general concerns related to COVID-19, and their provider is receiving emergency temporary funding, the provider will not be permitted to charge fees.

**Q13. Are there any conditions tied to receiving temporary emergency funding?**

- Yes, licensed child care centres accepting temporary emergency funding are required to:
  - not charge a parent fee for any period of closure (related to COVID-19) or for any vacant spaces (e.g. if a parent chooses to withdraw their child);
  - ensure spaces are protected/reserved once the pandemic passes for those families that were receiving child care prior to the pandemic and choose to temporarily withdraw their child due to COVID-19 concerns; and

- make every effort to provide inclusive child care programming, including for children with extra support needs.

**Q14. When and how will I receive more information from the Ministry about how to access emergency temporary funding?**

- The ministry will be holding a series of information sessions by teleconference over the next several days to address child care providers questions and concerns. More information about these sessions will be e-mailed directly to child care providers.
- In addition, all information regarding the ministry's response to COVID-19 can be found at the following link: [www.gov.bc.ca/MCFD-COVID](http://www.gov.bc.ca/MCFD-COVID).

## UNIVERSAL PROTOTYPE SITES

**Q15. My facility is a Childcare BC Universal Prototype Site, will I also be provided with financial support if I stay open?**

- Yes, if Prototype Sites can remain safely open to provide services to emergency workers and those in the community that need it, they will be paid their normal amount if they agree to:
  - not charge parent fees – even if a parent chooses to temporarily withdraw their child due to COVID-19; and
  - hold/reserve the space for existing families to access once the pandemic passes (facilities can temporarily fill the space, and charge a fee for that space, if other families/essential service workers require access).

**Q16. What if I close my facility, what will happen?**

- If providers choose to or must close due to COVID-19, they must notify the ministry ([MCF.Prototype@gov.bc.ca](mailto:MCF.Prototype@gov.bc.ca)) so we can determine your fixed costs (e.g. rent/lease/mortgage, etc.) excluding costs associated with staff/ECE wages. Payments will then be reduced to cover only fixed costs.
- This may mean some Prototype Sites will need to temporarily lay-off staff/ECEs and refer them (if eligible) to Employment Insurance.
- The federal government has implemented a range of [new financial support measures](#) to help Canadians facing hardship as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, including Employment Insurance without a waiting period, and the new Emergency Care and Support Benefits.
- The B.C. government has also announced additional financial support for British Columbians affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as part of its [COVID-19 Action Plan](#).

**Q17. What if I haven't signed my 2020/21 funding agreement?**

- Ministry staff have been working closely with all sites to negotiate funding levels for 20/21. If a Prototype Site chooses not to sign their 20/21 funding agreement, they will not be eligible for

continued prototype payments as of April 1, 2020 and would be required to apply for CCOF funding prior to being eligible to apply for the temporary emergency funding.

**Q18. If I stay open, can I pay my staff more for their work during this time?**

- If a Prototype Site can stay safely open, funding will continue uninterrupted, including established funding for ECE/staff wages. As most Prototype Sites' costs are paid by the Ministry, no additional funding is being provided to increase wages.

**Q19. What if I have additional costs that I cannot manage through my usual payments- extra cleaning for example**

- If you have unforeseen costs due to COVID-19, please contact the ministry directly to discuss these needs in greater detail.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

**Q20. How are you financially supporting ECEs during COVID-19?**

- We are doing all we can to provide temporary emergency funding to licensed facilities that choose to and are able to safely remain open during this time.
- This funding is a significant increase –7 times what licensed facilities currently receive in base CCOF funding – child care providers may choose to use this funding to support ECE wages during this period.
- We are also continuing with our previously announced intention to bring the total Early Childhood Educator Wage Enhancement to \$2 per hour, effective April 1, 2020.
- ECEs in facilities that close can apply for Federal government [support measures](#) such as Employment Insurance without a waiting period, and the new Emergency Care and Support Benefits.
- The B.C. government has also announced additional financial support for British Columbians affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as part of the [COVID-19 Action Plan](#).

**Q21. How is government addressing ECE health concerns while working during COVID-19?**

- We are working on a strategy to ensure that Early Childhood Educators feel safe and supported every day when they walk into work.
- Reducing the number of children in child care centres will make it easier for licensees and ECEs to follow preventative health measures.
- The Ministry of Health is developing detailed guidelines to inform child care providers, ECEs and licensing officers on implementation best practice, which will be circulated to child care providers shortly.

## PARENTS

### **Q22. My child care centre is closing due to COVID-19, will I still have to pay fees to hold my spot?**

- To support families who may be struggling with loss of employment and income, licensed child care providers who close temporarily due to COVID-19 can receive temporary emergency funding to cover up to approximately 20% of their operating costs, if they agree to:
  - not charge parent fees while closed;
  - reserve a space for families whose children were enrolled at the time of closure, so they can access that space again once the pandemic passes (provided their child has not aged out of care).

### **Q23. My family has paid child care fees for March, but my provider has already closed/or we have already chosen to temporarily withdraw our child from care. Will we see a refund?**

- Temporary emergency funding will come into effect beginning April 1<sup>st</sup> for eligible licensed child care providers. Providers that receives emergency funding may not charge parents fees for vacant spaces while they are open, including when a parent chooses to temporarily withdraw a child due to COVID-19.
- For parents that have already paid child care fees for the month of March, the decision to provide refunds rests with your child care provider.
- The B.C. Government has released the COVID-19 Action Plan – government’s first step to provide relief to people and businesses in British Columbia.
- The plan includes immediate measures to help individuals and families cope with potential illness, financial strain or precarious employment.
- Learn more about the action plan at [www.gov.bc.ca/covid19](http://www.gov.bc.ca/covid19)

### **Q24. What if I choose to temporarily withdraw my child from care due to COVID-19?**

- Licensed child care providers receiving emergency temporary funding from the ministry must not charge parents fees for vacant spaces while they are open, including when a parent chooses to temporarily withdraw a child due to COVID-19.
- Parents who notify their provider before the 15<sup>th</sup> of the calendar month should receive a partial refund/future credit from their facility (if the facility is in receipt of emergency temporary funding). Parents who notify on or after the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month will likely need to pay their regular fee for that month; however, they should not be charged for any future months (if the facility is in receipt of emergency temporary funding).
- Unlicensed providers, and providers that don’t access the emergency funding may continue to charge a fee – but this practice is strongly discouraged by the Ministry.

**Q25. Will I lose my child care space as a result of reduced service or temporary closure?**

- Licensed child care providers receiving emergency temporary funding from the ministry must agree to reserve spaces for families that were accessing their services before the pandemic, even if these families choose to temporarily withdraw, so families can be assured their spot will still be there once the pandemic passes.
- However, if your child ages out of the available space during the period of closure, the facility will not be able to guarantee you a space once the pandemic passes. (e.g. if you were accessing an infant/toddler space, and your child turns three during the period of closure).

**Q26. I'm required to self-isolate with my children, will I lose my ACCB funding?**

- Under current regulations, a family receiving ACCB can be absent for up to two weeks in any calendar month due to sickness or vacation and remain eligible for their regular benefit.
- This 2-week maximum would include absences due to self-isolation due to COVID-19.
- If a family is absent for longer than the 14-day maximum, their ACCB will be adjusted according to the Child Care Subsidy Regulation.
- If a child temporarily withdraws due to general concerns related to COVID-19, and their provider is receiving emergency temporary funding, the provider will not be permitted to charge fees.

**Q27. I still need to go to work during COVID-19, but my child care is closed, what should I do?**

- The ministry is working on a process to ensure we know which child care providers are open and can support essential workers' children, so we can provide this information to parents.
- Parents will be able to find this and other regularly updated information on the ministry's COVID-19 response website at: [www.gov.bc.ca/MCFD-COVID](http://www.gov.bc.ca/MCFD-COVID).
- In the meantime, parents can call or email their local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) Centre for more information.

**Q28. I still need to go to work during COVID-19, but my school-aged child needs care now that schools have suspended operations, what should I do?**

- School age facilities are also eligible for the emergency temporary funding and should be contacting their school principal and/or School District to discuss how best to meet community need.
- School districts are working on a strategy to support essential workers with care for school-aged children. School Districts will be in contact with families once their plans are complete.