

Minister Zappone announces plan to provide childcare for essential health workers

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone, today announced new, emergency measures to support essential health workers who are having difficulty meeting their childcare needs. This forms part of Phase 1 of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business.

The service will be limited to parents / guardians defined as essential health workers during the Covid emergency.

The delivery of childcare services to this group follows Government plans to lift restrictions gradually and in line with public health advice and recommendations. The scheme is designed to protect children, their families and the childcare practitioners who will offer this new service.

Existing, registered childcare services will be asked to consider signing up for the service and opening as an outreach hub. They will be asked to support essential healthcare workers by offering childcare in those families' homes. Childcare services which can fulfil this need will be requested to respond to a letter that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) will issue to every service in the country today. Only Tusla-registered services will be allowed to participate. All staff taking part will be experienced early learning and care or school-age childcare practitioners who have been Garda vetted.

A number of early learning and care and school-age childcare services have already indicated their willingness to support vital health staff. Pobal, which will assist DCYA with the administration of the new initiative, may focus initially on larger full-day services, but all services are being asked to consider signing up for the scheme.

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has acknowledged that many childcare practitioners will not be available to take part due to their own parenting or caring responsibilities, but she asked that those who are in a position to contribute to this element of Ireland's emergency call, would consider doing so.

The Government will make additional funding available to services that reopen to provide the service and details regarding this will be published in briefing material to be shared with providers today. In addition, there will be a low, flat-rate fee for parents who benefit from the new scheme.

In responding to the request to make childcare services available, Minister Zappone said:

"In these difficult and unprecedented times, we are all being asked to play our part. The early learning and care and school-age childcare sector has already indicated its willingness to help our colleagues in the health sector as they perform their critical work. Today, Government is formally asking them for their assistance."

The Minister continued:

"To this end, I have established a new emergency scheme which will fund childcare for parents and guardians working in essential health services to enable them to continue their crucial work during the Covid-19 pandemic."

“The Government is asking that childcare providers and their staff consider signing up for this service, and in doing so, make a significant contribution to the Covid-19 emergency.

“I am very grateful to the childcare sector which constantly demonstrates its willingness to go beyond the call of duty to support children and families.”

Minister Zappone plans that childcare provision under this initiative can become available from Monday 18 May, as part of Phase 1 of the easing of restrictions currently scheduled to begin on that day. While today’s communications are targeted towards childcare providers, to allow them start the process of signing up, more information will be made available early next week for parents or guardians. Once this information is made available, parents eligible for this temporary scheme can start to sign up.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is encouraging interested services to consider the information and Pobal will contact childcare providers through the standard communications channels. Pobal and DCYA will consider the number and circumstances of services that have confirmed their availability to contribute and they will select a number of these to start with. More services and / or their staff will be selected if required as time progresses.

30 City and County Childcare Committees around the country will assist Pobal and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in administering the service. Identified service providers will be contacted by Pobal as soon as possible to assess their availability to support this emergency measure.

Early next week, eligible health workers will be advised to contact a Pobal Parent Support Centre to request the service and to indicate their childcare needs and preferences.

The Minister concluded:

“There is a great sense of national solidarity with the health sector in this challenging time. The early learning and care and school-age childcare sector has already expressed huge support, offering help and advice to parents and guardians during this very difficult period.

Our ability to respond to this crisis reveals the value, strength and resilience of the sector and once again demonstrates that early learning and care and school-age childcare services are a critical part of the national infrastructure.”

All services that participate in this initiative will be supported to follow HSE guidance related to COVID-19. Information packs containing essential information and supports will be made available to them. Staff who outreach into family homes will continue to be supported by their employer.

ENDS