

ECDs, partial care facilities reopening readiness assessed

Social Development Minister Lindiwe Zulu has urged operators of ECD centres and partial care facilities across the country to complete the online self-assessment exercise before reopening.



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In a statement issued on Monday, the Department of Social Development (DSD) said this is critical in determining the sector's state of readiness to reopen amid the Coronavirus pandemic.

The forms, which are accessible on the department's website, were developed in consultation with the sector. The forms are also available at local Social Development offices and service points within which ECD centres or partial care facilities operate.

"To date, more than 6,700 ECD programmes and/or partial care facilities have completed this self-assessment exercise online, in addition to those who have made manual submissions to the provincial Departments of Social Development," the department said.

More than 51% of the online completions are from programmes that are registered or conditionally registered, as required

in terms of the Children's Act; whereas about 20% of completions are from those that have applied for registration.

All ECD centres and partial care facilities were closed in March following the declaration of the state of national disaster by President Cyril Ramaphosa, as part of the national measures to contain the spread of Coronavirus.

"As we prepare to reopen the sector, which we will announce in due course through directives, as per the requirements of the Disaster Management Act, it is critical that we ensure we have taken all necessary precautionary and control measures to uphold the best interest of our children.

"The self-assessment is critical in assisting the department to assess the sector's Covid-19 response plan and the state of readiness. We know the important role that the sector plays in our country's child protection system and its contribution to children's emotional and cognitive development," said Zulu.

Upon submission of the self-assessment, the department will verify the information to determine the centre's state of readiness.

"As more parents/caregivers return to work, we want them to have the confidence that we have done everything possible to keep our children and staff at ECD centres and partial care facilities safe during this difficult time. We cannot compromise the health and safety of our children," said Zulu.

The Minister reiterated that ECD centres and partial care facilities will remain closed until further notice.

Verifying state of readiness

Provincial departments are currently verifying submitted information to determine the state of readiness for the reopening of ECD programmes and/or partial care facilities, which provide an afterschool service.

The verification process will include site visits to assess compliance with the minimum health, safety and social distancing measures, amongst others.

"The department will continue to work closely with all partners in the sector to ensure that the health and safety of children, parents/caregivers and staff of ECD centres and partial care facilities are at the forefront of service delivery," the statement reads.

The department emphasised that the purpose of the self-assessment is to determine whether the ECD centres and partial care facilities meet the minimum requirements under the Disaster Management Act regulations

"In addition, the Department of Social Development wishes to emphasise with reference to the Circular dated 21 June 2020, that no child may return to an early childhood development programme or partial care facility until such time that the Minister has pronounced in the Government Gazette the date(s) and conditions of reopening," said the department.

If an ECD programme or partial care facility receives a child before the date is announced, they will be contravening the provisions of the regulations.

To this effect, the Minister of Social Development will publish the directives pertaining the reopening of early childhood development programmes and partial care facilities after she has taken into consideration all requirements to address, prevent and combat the spread of Covid-19.

"As the department supports ECD centres and partial care facilities across the country to implement Covid-19 preventive and control measures for reopening of the sector, we wish to thank all parents/caregivers for their cooperation and patience during these unprecedented times," said the department.

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