

Minister Lindiwe Zulu reminds ECD centres and partial care facilities across the country to complete the online self-assessment exercise to re-open under Coronavirus COVID-19 Alert Level 3

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The Minister of Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu takes this opportunity to remind all operators of ECD centres and partial care facilities across the country to complete the online self-assessment exercise, which is critical in determining the sector's state of readiness to re-open amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Developed in consultation with the sector, the self-assessment form is free and accessible on <https://forms.gle/c7y8ZL5W94diuqTS6> . 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.

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 (Act No. 38 of 2005), 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 COVID-19 pandemic.

"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 that 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 Minister Zulu.

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

"As more and 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", added Minister Zulu.

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

The Department wishes to take this opportunity to thank all ECD centres and partial care facilities that have promptly completed and submitted the self-assessment forms to provincial departments. Provincial Departments are currently verifying submitted information to determine state of readiness for the re-opening of early childhood development programmes and/or partial care facilities that 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 Department of Social Development wishes to reiterate the following with regard to the completion of the self-assessment:

- **There are no costs or fees linked to the completion and submission of the self-assessment form (Form 1)**
- **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**
- **There is no new deadline for the completion and submission of the self-assessment, other than that it is a pre-requirement for the reopening of ECD centres and partial care facilities**
- **ECD and partial care facilities that have not completed the self-assessment and undergone verification process will not be permitted to operate.**

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.

If an early childhood development programme or partial care facility receives a child before the date is announced, they will be contravening the provisions of the regulations made in terms of section 27(2) of the Disaster Management Act. 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.

Given the current increase in the number of infections across the country, nothing is more important than saving lives.

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