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**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NUMBER: 1008**

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**1008. Ms A L A Abrahams (DA) to ask the Minister of Social Development:**

What are the details of the joint phasing-in plan by her department and the Department of Basic Education for the reopening of early childhood development centres (ECDs) under level 3 of the risk adjusted approach to Covid-19 within the Republic in terms of (a) on what date will ECDs be allowed to open under level 3, (b) will ECDs be allowed to open in provinces which remain on level 4, (c) will ECDs be provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) from the Government, (d) the total number of children that will be permitted in each ECD facility, (e) who will be enforcing social distancing and PPE regulations within ECDs and (f) what training ECD facilitators and/or practitioners will receive in preparation to receive learners? NW1297E

**REPLY:**

Early Childhood Development services registered in terms of Children’s Act 38 of 2005 remain closed under level 3 of risk adjusted approach to Covid-19 within the Republic:

(a) Currently the department is working with civil society, private and International organisations such as UNICEF and Nelson Mandela Foundation to prepare readiness for re-opening. The task team will lead readiness assessment; the outcome of the assessment will determine the date for re-opening.

(b) The opening and closure of ECD services in provinces that remain on level 4 will be determined by the national risk restrictive measures attached to that level. If national risk measures require ECD services to remain closed during that level, ECD services will remain closed

(c) It should be noted that unlike Education there are no public ECD services, ECD services are provided through NPOs. There is therefore no budget specifically allocated to ECD services to provide PPEs except the subsidy to increase access to children whose families are in distress and cannot afford ECD fees. However, the department has requested provinces to use the savings from subsidy for the first quarter to procure PPEs and ensure readiness and compliance with COVID19. Furthermore, the conditional grant makes provision for infrastructure which is minimal.

The department therefore engaged National Treasury to re-purpose the infrastructure grant towards provision of support to ECD services that are basically serving children in disadvantaged communities. The funding thereof is limited and strict criteria will be developed to ensure that support is directed where there is dire need.

(d) The established task team referred to in (a) is in a process of finalising the protocols that will guide the reopening of ECD services, the number of children will be within the protocols guided by risk measures as per the national regulations and Directives. (e) The established team has developed mechanisms for monitoring compliances which places responsibility on the department working in collaboration with the ECD structures. The department will take measures to those ECD services that do not adhere to COVID 19 compliance measures. Such ECD services may face closure as they will be endangering the health and lives of children. (f) It is the responsibility of each ECD operator to ensure that ECD practitioners and all categories of workforce are capacitated on COVID 19 measures and are ready to receive children. The department will work in collaboration with DoH to do spot checks for opening readiness.