

Amid COVID-19 concerns, P.E.I. daycare closures cause uncertainty for workers, parents ^[1]

Daycare centres on P.E.I. closed from March 17 until further notice

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EXCERPTS

Daycare workers and parents on P.E.I. say the safety of their children remains the top priority, but the closure of daycare centres across the province has left them with unanswered questions.

On Sunday, P.E.I. government and health officials announced closures of all daycare centres from March 17 until further notice as part of government's preventive measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.

The shutdown affects more than 70 private and public daycares across the Island, which employ more than 500 people. Some employees, who will be out of work for three weeks, are uncertain about the impact the closures will have due to a lack of information. On Monday, the province announced \$25 million in aid for workers and businesses affected by closures. Officials also said government is exploring compensation plans for child-care staff.

Maddy Miller, a daycare worker from First Friends Child Care, said her main concern is for families.

"Do they have to pay? Do they lose their spots? What's going to happen for families that you know, they still have to go to work and find childcare or still have to pay and lose out on work?"

On Monday, the 11 staff at Little Lambs Child Care Centre were giving the place one last scrub before doors close and they are laid off.

Little Lambs director Michele Coker said people are OK with the closures, and will do whatever it takes to beat the coronavirus, but she has few answers for parents and staff.

"It is a little scary. Staff are worried about getting paid. I'm worried about paying bills. Hopefully we get answers to that soon."

The province has said it is working out the details of financial compensation as parents begin to make alternate arrangements.

Some are relying on private babysitters, older brothers and sisters who are now not in school or extended family such as grandparents

"The only people you have for daytime care are grandparents — and they're kind of the people we want to protect," said Vanessa Trainor, a parent who has a daughter in daycare.

She said she is also worried about the effect on self-employed workers like her husband.

"He doesn't get paid unless he works, and I know there's a lot of people out there in the same position," she said. "I think it's important that the government lets us know how quickly can we get money for people to pay bills, because those don't stop."

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Region: Prince Edward Island ^[3]

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