

Coronavirus: Manitoba government working on plan for childcare during pandemic ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Manitoba government says it will answer some of the questions surrounding the closure of licensed daycares, and the home daycares that are to remain open, by the end of the week.

Licensed daycares and preschools in Manitoba are to close by the end of the day Friday until April 10 to help fight the spread of COVID-19, Premier Brian Pallister said Tuesday.

This comes after calls from childcare workers to do so.

Karen Ohlson, the executive director of Kids Incorporated, said she had plans to close her daycare regardless, but feared she would lose government funding.

"We're happy that they finally decided to follow the science of social distancing," Ohlson said.

"It's impossible to socially distance a two-year-old and children in child care. We just don't have the space for it and it was not an acceptable practice for us."

Ohlson said she still isn't sure how the closures will impact staff and parents.

"We're still waiting for the province to let us know what they're authorizing us to do," she said.

Home daycares will still be allowed to remain open.

Melaine Ochoa, a home daycare provider, said she isn't happy with that decision and can't afford to close without direction from the province.

"So we are ... choosing either our health or our income here," Ochoa said. "We're choosing two really not good options."

Home-based child care providers, which have a regulated maximum of eight children, or 12 children where two providers are operating in the same home, are still safe to operate, according to Families Minister Heather Stefanson.

"We will be looking at ways to expand home-based child care so that working families still have some access to child care if absolutely necessary," Stefanson said in an email.

"We are also currently exploring options to provide child care for essential services workers, with the requirement that the centres not exceed 16 children."

The government is taking an inventory of essential services workers who will need child care after March 20 and who cannot make other, short-term arrangements.

Parents who fall in that category should call 204-945-0776 or 1-888-213-4754 (toll-free), or e-mail to cdcinfo@gov.mb.ca ^[3].

Stefanson said the province is in talks with the Manitoba Child Care Association and will disclose further details regarding funding for centres and pay for workers before the suspension of child care services.

The province said it isn't aware of any COVID-19 cases in schools or daycares in Manitoba.

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