

Coronavirus: Manitoba daycare workers 'treated like garbage' say early childhood educators ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Manitoba childcare workers should not "be on the front lines of sickness" as COVID-19 moves through the province, says an early childhood educator.

John, who asked not to use his last name for fear of losing his job, said after the province announced Friday that schools — but not childcare centres — would close down for three weeks, workers at his centre reacted universally with shock and anger.

"Once again, we're being treated like garbage," said John, who has been an Early Childhood Educator for more than five years.

"Do you think toddlers wash their hands and not touch their face? We do our best but these are little kids and germs are just... just everywhere."

Funding for daycare centres has been frozen by the province since 2016. The Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA) has been advocating for more funding for additional spaces and pay raises but hasn't seen that happen.

When asked Friday about the possibility of closing child care centres along with schools, Premier Brian Pallister said discussions are happening.

"These decisions are being evaluated and will be acted upon in due course," he said. "I wouldn't want it reported that we're dismissing the possibility of discussing it further."

While it was good to hear the province is considering possibilities, said Jodie Kehl of the MCCA, the association questions why it didn't happen along with school closure announcements.

"Why weren't child care programs also included in considering the suspension and closure?" Kehl said to 680 CJOB.

"The health and safety and well-being of those young, 0-5 [aged] children in those licensed spaces, should they be going to child care right now ... are we perpetuating the risk?"

Quebec has announced daycare closures across the board, and some daycares in Ontario are closing, as well as school closures.

Kehl said the MCCA has received numerous phone calls from panicked parents about where they will take their children if schools close down, and she said since the association isn't the province's licensing authority, they have directed those questions to the province.

"We can't magically open up new spaces, nor do I know if that's a good idea."

About 37,000 children are in daycare spaces in Manitoba, and staff are working overtime to make sure their daycares are clean and sanitized, said Kehl.

Online, other daycare workers expressed their frustration.

"Children at school age level are typically better at keeping their germs to themselves," wrote one. "We cannot say the same for daycare age children. I don't understand why schools are closed but not daycares!! Not saying I agree with either but logically it doesn't make sense!"

"You know a snowball has a better chance in the devil's back yard than those daycare workers have of not running into this virus," said another.

"And once it gets into the daycare this virus spreads like a bad weed. Especially when it's transmissible before symptoms even surface."

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