

Licensed daycares in Saskatchewan still open amid novel coronavirus pandemic ^[1]

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Source: Global News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 17 Mar 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

The province is shuttering schools and their attached childcare centres on Friday, but Saskatchewan's chief medical health officer said no decisions have been made about whether licensed daycares will keep their doors open amid the novel coronavirus pandemic.

"We're looking at that closely," Dr. Saqib Shahab said in a news conference on Tuesday. "We want to support people who have to go to work."

Staff at the Downtown Early Learning Centre in Saskatoon normally care for 25 children a day. On Tuesday, there were just seven.

Daycare director Shalin Clements said she's anxiously awaiting an announcement from the province.

"It's a little nervewracking," Clements told Global News. "It's a lot of uncertainty. We have a lot of staff and a lot of families that it will affect."

Closing licensed daycares would leave early childhood educators without work, while some families would have to scramble to make alternative childcare arrangements, she said.

"Everybody is stressing," said the mother of three, whose oldest son is watching her other two children now that they've been pulled from school.

"Every family that doesn't have a stay-at-home parent is going to have to make some kind of arrangements."

So far, she hasn't received an influx of calls from parents frantically trying to find other options as school daycares close.

Despite the added pressure to families and daycare workers, Clements said the childcare centres don't lend themselves well to social distancing, so closing the facilities could help prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19.

"We're all about love and cuddles and hugs and sharing and helping your friends," she said. "Now all of a sudden, we're telling them, 'No, don't do any of that.'"

Counsellor Alexandra Froese has two young children. She and her partner are both working from the office, so they had to get a babysitter.

"It's an adjustment that we needed to make really quickly," she said. "Naturally there's some stress connected to it, but ... we are starting to adjust to it."

The registered psychologist said it's a stressful time for parents and their children.

"If it is anxiety that the adult is feeling, the child is feeling that as well in that moment," she said.

"You just need to juggle more balls at the same time, so that's where it becomes more problematic."

Changing childcare demands for people working at home may require some uncomfortable adjustment, but Froese noted it's for the purpose of keeping families healthy.

"As long as you maintain communication with your partner and you can just embrace this as an opportunity to make memories with your children ... you can really begin to become more flexible," she said.

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