

# Manitoba health-care workers want action on child-care promise <sup>[1]</sup>

Essential workers to keep working through COVID-19 pandemic as most daycares close Friday

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**Source:** CBC News

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 19 Mar 2020

## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

With more daycares set to close in Manitoba Friday, health-care workers expected to work through the COVID-19 pandemic want details on how they can access child care promised by the province.

Licensed daycare centres and preschools in the province will close on Friday until April 10, although some may stay open for health-care and other essential workers, Premier Brian Pallister announced Tuesday.

Work was underway to "ensure that child care will be available for our front-line emergency staff who need those services," Pallister said. But essential workers want details on those plans.

"We've seen a huge uptick in terms of members reaching out to us in terms of what happens with that, can I use sick time, are there supports there?" said Bob Moroz, president of Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals. The association represents respiratory therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, lab technicians and technologists.

"It's an enormous issue that has certainly shown up on our doorstep with our members ... who are parents."

The province has updated its child-care phone line, where health-care workers can now leave a voicemail indicating their situation and need. The province has also asked all child-care centres to identify their front-line parents— nurses, nursing aides, police, paramedics, hospital cleaning staff, etc.— who will need support.

Letters have gone out to all health-care workers who are parents to identify need, said Lanette Siragusa, the province's chief nursing officer. She met with Families Minister Heather Stefanson Wednesday on the daycare issue, along with the human resources lead for Shared Health Services and Dr. Brent Roussin, the province's chief public health officer.

"We will work with the individual sites in terms of essential workers in ensuring those workers have spots," Siragusa said Thursday. Health Minister Cameron Friesen said an update on childcare for essential workers is coming soon.

But the Manitoba Nurses' Union is also calling for action now.

"We need to see emergency child-care measures put in place that would allow nurses and other essential workers to serve the community as required during this time of need," said Darlene Jackson, the union's president.

She points to Quebec, where the province has set up daycares for parents who work in health care and other essential services.

"Nurses want to be there for patients, and be part of an effective response to the COVID-19 outbreak. However, in order for nurses to work, many require access to reliable child-care services," Jackson said.

On Wednesday night, Shared Health sent a memo to all staff, indicating that if they need to stay home during the pandemic to care for their children, they can use banked or vacation time, and can take unpaid leave once that's used up.

"The employer is being uncaring," said Moroz.

"People are feeling in a pinch, and they are feeling like they are on their own. Is an elderly grandparent the ideal person to ask for child care in situations like this? We're really looking for the employer to step up, and government as well."

The union added workers would like an option like leave to be available so they can access Employment Insurance.

The province says it is still 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 into that category should call 204-945-0776 or 1-888-213-4754 (toll-free), or e-mail to [cdcinfo@gov.mb.ca](mailto:cdcinfo@gov.mb.ca) <sup>[3]</sup>.

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