

Updated: Childcare in schools will be allowed, says minister ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

MEDICINE HAT, AB – The Alberta government announced nearly \$18 million in grant funding for the childcare sector Wednesday but what Medicine Hat daycare providers are asking for most from the province are COVID-19 guidelines which will allow them to open and operate safely.

For parent Miranda Christensen, who was enjoying a day out with her father and six-year-old son CJ Thursday, she highlighted more appears to have been done to ensure golf courses could open than daycare facilities.

And while she has a supportive employer and family, that's not the case for all parents.

"For most parents, it's not a hard choice. You pick your child," said Christensen. "But at the same time, you end up without a job and how do you care for that child the way that you want to. It just needs to be looked after and sorted out."

Only a handful of pre-school daycare spaces are currently available in Medicine Hat for essential workers and there's no out-of-school care outside of day homes.

Nature's Way Learning Centre is one of those daycares currently open for children under seven years old, primarily providing care for medical staff.

Owner Dorian Gomez says she would like to provide more spaces but it's unclear if the guidelines she's been working under prior to the provincial relaunch set for next week will be altered as part of the wider opening of businesses on May 14.

"My main concern is being left in the dark and not knowing what to relate to my families," said Gomez.

As for out-of-school care for elementary school-aged children, when or even if there will be childcare spaces available anytime soon is a question looming large for working parents.

The issue is compounded by schools, which remain closed, being the primary venue for such childcare, says Jennifer Usher, coordinator for Medicine Hat and District Childcare Association.

"Most of our out-of-school care is located within school buildings, so I think that is going to be the biggest challenge in reopening those," said Usher. "And the minister of children's services has said in the past that co-located locations could not be opened."

Usher says that could change in the coming days. But even if it does, an even larger concern exists across the province as to what guidelines, supports and training will be available to reopen childcare spaces.

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