

Daycare providers confused as government backtracks on non-contact thermometer use ^[1]

Canadian Pediatric Society doesn't recommend using touchless thermometers on children, Public Health says

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EXCERPTS

Daycares in the province are dealing with a change to their morning routine after the government sent out an updated recovery plan for childcare facilities stating non-contact thermometers are not to be used on children under the age of 12.

When arriving at childcare facilities, children are required to have their temperatures checked and parents must submit a screening questionnaire.

Sunny Days Children's Center, located in Fredericton, had 107 children enrolled before COVID-19 but now has about 60.

Owner Jenny Gaines-Rattray said having to switch to ear or under the arm temperature checks isn't as simple as it sounds. She said her staff estimates about an added one minute in drop-off time per child.

"You're trying to get a good temperature read and they're squirming and they want to go inside or they want to stay with mom and dad. Yes, it's added stress in the morning for sure."

Up until now some daycares were screening children with the government provided non-contact thermometers, which allowed for a quick morning drop off and midday temperature checks.

Department of Health communications director Bruce Macfarlane said in an emailed statement that the Canadian Pediatric Society does not recommend using touchless thermometers for children because they are not as accurate as other methods.

The director of Little Geniuses Daycare, Melissa McCallum said she was surprised when given the non-contact thermometers because she's always known they aren't recommended for children.

She said she understands infrared thermometers aren't always that accurate but they had a system in place to ensure accuracy.

"What we had done and what we'd been advised to do is to use the infrared along with say an underarm thermometer and compare the difference on a child so that we could get a baseline comparison."

The owner of Little Rascals daycare Sarah Carr said the new guidelines not only take longer but also take away from the welcoming factor in the morning.

"It's just a more hands on form of having to get them undressed outside so we can get their armpit temperature or poke them in their ear upon entrance."

"It just takes away a little bit of the welcoming factor for the children having to be probed before they even enter our facility."

Both Carr and Gaines-Rattray said they had trouble finding thermometers and still don't have as many as they'd like. Gaines-Rattray called six different pharmacies before finding any. She also worries about the added cost.

"It's now just more money out, the new thermometers are not being provided to us by the government."

While Gaines-Rattray said she understands that this is an evolving situation, she wishes they were given more clear guidelines.

"We are heavily regulated by the government and therefore we need clear direction in order to follow all these new health and safety guidelines. Sometimes that is very frustrating when we're not given clear direction promptly."

She said despite the frustration, she's thankful that parents and staff have been so good at adjusting to changes as they come.

"We will eventually get into a new routine and I'm sure in a week or two it will be the new normal, until it changes again."

Corrections

- The subhead in an earlier version of this story stated Department of Health spokesperson Bruce Macfarlane didn't recommend non-contact thermometers. In fact, Macfarlane said it was the Canadian Pediatric Society that doesn't recommend the devices.

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