

Education workers especially worried about COVID-19, INSPQ polls find ^[1]

Seventeen per cent of education workers showed a problematic level of psychological distress, compared to 13 per cent for other respondents, the Quebec health institute said.

Author: Denoncourt, Jean-Philippe

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EXCERPTS

Workers in Quebec's elementary schools and educational child-care services are generally more worried than the rest of the population about COVID-19, polls show.

Three weeks before the start of the school year in Quebec, the results of the surveys published by the INSPQ provincial health institute show a worrisome level of psychological distress and anxiety among elementary school and daycare service workers compared with other Quebecers aged 18 to 69.

Seventeen per cent of education workers showed a problematic level of psychological distress, compared to 13 per cent for the other respondents, INSPQ said. Fifty per cent also reported that their feelings of anxiety had increased, 11 percentage points higher than other respondents.

Sixty per cent of the education workers polled said it was difficult to establish physical distancing at work, compared to 36 per cent of other respondents aged 18 to 69, INSPQ said. In addition, 35 per cent of school and daycare workers who consume alcohol felt their consumption had increased in the 15 days preceding the survey.

More primary school and daycare workers felt that Quebec moved too quickly to lift confinement measures, and many more were worried about transmitting COVID-19 to people around them. Elementary school teachers and support staff returned to school in May, with the exception of those in metropolitan Montreal, the Joliette area and the town of L'Épiphanie.

Quebec announced Monday that it will wait until next week to unveil an updated plan on the measures to be taken at the start of the school year to fight COVID-19 — sparking criticism from the province's three opposition parties. Ontario unveiled a detailed plan last Thursday that included additional budgets for hiring staff and a requirement to wear masks as of Grade 4.

For its part, the Fédération autonome de l'enseignement, which includes nine unions that represent more than 49,000 Quebec teachers, says that if Education Minister Jean-François Roberge had accepted teachers' suggestions on how to manage the pandemic, there would have been less improvisation and instructions would have been clearer.

INSPQ polled 1,000 Quebec adults online in late May. Results must be interpreted with caution given the sampling technique used, the institute said.

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