

Winnipeg daycare speaks out after province provided staff with non-medical grade masks ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

WINNIPEG -- A daycare in Winnipeg is speaking out after the province mandated daycare staff to wear medical-grade masks, but provided masks later discovered not to be medical-graded.

When code red restrictions came into effect in the Winnipeg Metro Region, Lois Coward, the executive director of the Niigaanaki Day Care Centre in the city, said she was told by the province that all staff at child care centres would now have to wear a medical-grade mask.

"With that, we got another message from the Early Learning and Child Care Program saying that they would be supplying us with medical-grade masks, and we thought 'okay, this is great,'" Coward told CTV News.

"They slowly started to arrive earlier this week and as they arrived I took one out of the box and I thought it was a little strange – it seemed quite thin compared to even the ones I had purchased previously."

Coward said one of her colleagues was able to read a tag found in the box that was written in Chinese, which indicated the masks were not medical-grade. She said the mask company confirmed this in an email to her co-worker.

Province says masks meet "Canadian Standards"

Coward said she reached out to the province with concerns about the masks they provided and was told the masks are fine.

In a statement to CTV News, Families Minister Heather Stefanson said the masks are safe.

"These masks meet Canada's national medical-grade criteria and are approved by Shared Health and Dr. Brent Roussin, Manitoba's chief provincial public health officer," she said.

A provincial spokesperson later told CTV News the tag in the box of masks has led to "unnecessary confusion and concerns."

They said while definitions and requirements for masks vary, the type of masks provided to Manitoba's child care centres meet Canadian standards for medical-grade masks.

Roussin said in a statement to CTV News that none of the masks provided by the province have been recalled at this point.

Still, Coward isn't sold on the province-supplied masks.

"I don't feel confident that I can tell my staff that (the masks) will protect them with wearing something that honestly looks like it came from the dollar store," Coward said.

Manitoba Opposition slams province over masks

The daycare director also reached out to Manitoba's official opposition with her concerns.

"The Pallister government has repeatedly failed to protect Early Childhood Educators and the children they care for throughout this pandemic," said NDP MLA Malaya Marcelino in a news release.

"After months of causing chaos within the sector, now the province is handing out cheap masks that don't protect essential workers."

In the statement, Stefanson accused the NDP of fear-mongering and playing politics with the issue.

Coward said she is providing her staff with proper medical-grade masks – a cost that is coming out of her pocket.

"It is going to cost \$150 a week just to put masks on my staff," she said, adding she doesn't know where this money will come from.

"We are an inner-city daycare, we have lots of new immigrant parents and single parents, so I can't put the cost onto them for sure, but then other parts of our program will suffer."

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

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