

Working parents facing tough decisions as outbreaks continue to grow in Calgary daycares ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

CALGARY -- The province has decided day care centres will not be closing as part of the latest round of restrictions announced Monday.

But with the list of outbreaks at child-care facilities in the Calgary area now sitting at 27, with just under 200 active cases, parents are finding they are having tough discussions whether to keep their kids in or pull them out to reduce the chances of exposure to COVID-19.

"Just after the new restrictions came out last night, my husband and I were talking about it and just being a numbers game, (so) we decided to make the decision to pull them out for the time being," said Claudine Lang-Hodge.

Her one-year-old just started daycare on Monday, joining her three-year-old sister.

"With the kids at home it's not easy to have a job or to be able to get things done so it's really really tough and then making the decision to pull them out is also difficult. Then you don't have the programming, you don't have the interaction with the other kids, (so) it's been really tough for us to make the call," said Lang-Hodge.

Extending maternity leave

Lang-Hodge has decided to extend her maternity leave.

"In order to put them back in, the numbers would have to come down drastically," she said.

But many parents don't have options.

"Most of the parents they are frontline workers, they're working in hospitals, and nurses, doctors so I think they can't go to work if we have to close the daycares," said Gargi Saini, owner of Little Scholars Daycare.

Saini said the province made the right decision to keep child-care centres open.

She said the facility, which has 130 children, is taking as many precautions as possible; temperature checks every morning, keeping kids and staff in cohorts, increased sanitation and not allowing visitors inside.

"We are trying our best to keep our children safe and I think we have to keep the daycares open, only then we can help [a] little with the economy running," said Saini.

Saini said last month their Northwest location in Beddington had an outbreak and closed for 10 days. Parents were notified immediately and everyone has since recovered.

She said this is a stressful time for operators and parents and they are taking precautions to keep staff and children safe.

Critical for children

The province says child care programs are critical for helping children maintain social and emotional stability during this time and allowing parents to continue to work.

"While some child care centres are experiencing challenges with staffing similar to the education system, Alberta Health has advised that child care centres are not a source of significant spread of COVID-19 and that the numbers of cases linked with child care centres mirror community transmission. They are also on a different operational scale than schools," said the office of the Minister of Children's Services.

The province said since last fall, child care centres have been operating under guidelines developed by Alberta Health and Children's Services.

"In the case of an outbreak, health officials act quickly and work closely with operators to limit spread and protect the health of everyone involved. This includes conducting contact tracing and ensuring that anyone at risk of exposure is contacted, isolated and tested. As

appropriate, AHS and licensing officers also work with facilities to help ensure all necessary cleaning, masking, screening and other health precautions are in place,” said the department.

The province said child care operators have been provided over \$130 million for pandemic relief costs such as cleaning supplies and PPE.

Region: Alberta ^[3]

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