

Essential workers struggle with childcare as Iqaluit lockdown continues^[1]

'We are literally taking it day-by-day and it's just really stressful,' says Iqaluit healthcare worker

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EXCERPTS

Essential workers in Iqaluit are missing work as they struggle to manage childcare while daycares and schools remain closed due to an outbreak of COVID-19.

A healthcare worker says she's had to miss up to three days of work a week to take care of her kids since the lockdown started on April. 15.

CBC has agreed to keep the identity of the healthcare worker confidential due to fear of repercussions from her employer.

The healthcare worker and her partner are both essential workers with kids too small to leave home alone.

"It is extremely frustrating because of our schedules and there is no daycare, there's no school," said the worker.

CBC spoke to the worker during a rare free moment sitting in her car between groceries and relieving her partner from child care duties so they could go to work. It was one of those days where they had to make a choice between who got to work.

"We are literally taking it day-by-day and it's just really stressful," she said.

She says with both doing shift work, it's almost impossible to plan ahead and create a stable routine for their kids.

When one of them is home, there is school work to help with and busy hands and minds to entertain.

"I feel like both [of us] are wearing many, many hats, and it is very, very challenging," said the healthcare worker.

No daycares set to open

The Department of Education told CBC in a statement that it has reached out to Iqaluit daycares to see if any will open to provide care for essential workers' kids. But the department said they haven't had any commitments so far.

Daycares in Nunavut are home-based or run by non-profit organizations. Though the Department of Education is responsible for licensing these facilities, they have no authority to direct them to open.

In the statement the department said it would provide support to daycares in order to operate safely during the COVID-19 outbreak. The support would come in maintenance funding, and additional training on how to operate safely.

Nunavut's chief public health officer, Dr. Michael Patterson, said at a news conference that the public health orders have some flexibility to allow for child care for essential workers.

Under the orders, up to five people from outside of a household can enter for emergency or critical services.

Patterson said this can apply to child care for essential workers, "either for children to go to a house to get child care or an individual to come in to babysit while people are at work."

But even if a daycare were to open, the healthcare worker said she'd still have reservations about exposing her children to people outside their home. As of Thursday, the city had 74 active cases of COVID-19.

She's also worried about leaving her kids at someone else's house.

"We could innocently pass it onto our friends' kids," she said. "It is a hard time to know what to do."

That leaves workplaces without some of the staff deemed essential.

No sign of the lockdown lifting

There is no sign of the lockdown lifting in Iqaluit for the foreseeable future. Nunavut's Premier Joe Savikataaq has been urging residents to stop gathering to break transmission and not to prolong the lockdown.

"For two parents who are deemed essential workers, we don't feel supported completely," the healthcare worker said.

"Being essential means they need us and we are trying our best to do our job ... but being a parent is the most essential role I have by far, and I feel like I'm not giving my 100 per cent to my family life because I'm constantly trying to balance it all."

Region: Nunavut ^[3]

Tags: school and child care closures^[4]

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