

Child-care centres say more guidance needed as COVID-19 cases rise in P.E.I. ^[1]

'There was just a lack of guidance'

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EXCERPTS

Some child-care centres in Charlottetown remained open Monday after several schools in the city were shut down due to outbreaks of COVID-19.

Some centre operators say they wish the Chief Public Health Office had communicated with them about what steps they should take in such a scenario.

In a public briefing Sunday, P.E.I.'s Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Heather Morrison announced the decision to suspend classes at several Island schools following new cases of COVID-19 in people under 19. Monday, she announced more cases for a total of 19 active cases, 10 of them at two Charlottetown-area schools.

Classes at West Royalty Elementary School in Charlottetown are cancelled for this week, while classes at several other Charlottetown-area schools are cancelled for at least three days.

KidHub, a company with child-care centres in the affected area, decided not to run any day or after-school programs Monday in Charlottetown due to the outbreak, but opted to keep their Cornwall location open.

'They didn't give us any guidance'

KidHub's program director Michelle Brown said she would have liked to see more direction from the province when it comes to child care centres.

"There was just a lack of guidance, especially for after-school programs. Because they are closing schools in the Charlottetown area and we're catering to school-aged children of the same age, but they didn't give us any guidance on how to operate or if we should close or not," said Brown.

In terms of reopening, she said the centre is taking it day by day.

"We weigh out all the issues of parents needing to go to work, needing child care, but also keeping everybody healthy and safe."

At Little Ducklings child-care centre in Stratford the doors were open Monday, but with only a third of the normal number of children.

Owner Nicole LeClair said essential workers were grateful the daycare was an option this morning.

"We have a lot of anxious parents about COVID. On the other hand we have a lot of anxious parents about us closing. So we have had a lot of great messages for us staying open," LeClair said.

Sunday's announcement about the outbreak and school closures left a lot of people confused, LeClair said.

"As an owner, we were then trying to find someone to talk to Sunday afternoon to figure out if we could be open ... we had parents messaging us before the press conference was over."

Derek Power is a father of two young children and says he's had to take two days off work to take care for them, but is managing.

"It just throws everybody's day off, and obviously you have to rearrange your whole life to accommodate for children. It puts everyone in an unwanted situation."

In response to questions about the confusion from CBC News during Monday's public COVID-19 briefing, Morrison said school-aged children attending day programs should be well screened, and at this point it is up to the individual child-care centres to decide whether to open, and whether to allow after-school programs.

She noted there have been no cases among daycare-age children in P.E.I., and said anyone who has been identified as a close contact of any

of the previous cases should not attend after-school programs.

"We're keeping it at the forefront of our minds in the days ahead," she said of guidance to early childhood centres.

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