

18% of P.E.I. child-care workers not fully vaccinated, province reveals ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Nearly one in five staff members at child-care centres on Prince Edward Island are not fully vaccinated, and haven't had to undergo regular testing until this week, the province has revealed.

According to the province's survey last month of staff working at licensed child-care centres, 82 per cent of respondents indicated they were fully vaccinated. That's five per cent lower than the province's overall vaccination rate among eligible Islanders, which now stands at 87 per cent.

P.E.I.'s Education Department provided the child-care staff vaccination rate to CBC News in an email Thursday.

"I think on all of P.E.I., there are people... choosing not to vaccinate," said Jennifer Nangreaves, the executive director of the Early Childhood Development Association of P.E.I.

"I think we just have to trust in this protocol of 'vaccine or test,' and just hope it provides that extra line of defence for protecting children and families."

The province announced a "vaccinate or test" policy for staff at P.E.I. schools in mid-September, after a survey showed 90 per cent of school employees were fully vaccinated. Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Heather Morrison said that rate was "not high enough for me to be comfortable."

A week later, the province said the testing policy would apply to all provincial employees dealing with vulnerable populations, including those working in child-care centres.

Child-care centres began receiving the rapid test kits last week, and got the official directive from the province to implement the policy this week.

Staff who aren't fully vaccinated now need to be tested before their shift begins, three times a week.

"It's really simple, really easy, not complicated at all. So we're well on our way," said Kellie Davies with Milestones Early Childhood Development Centre in Stratford.

'One more line of defence'

Davies said just two of the centre's 31 staff aren't yet fully vaccinated and require testing. One has received her second dose, but won't be considered fully vaccinated for another two weeks. The other has one dose and plans to get the second.

Davies said she is somewhat surprised the province-wide vaccination rate among child-care staff isn't higher.

"Among our employees, everyone was encouraging everybody," she said. "It's one more line of defence between us and those kiddos we care for every day... Everyone knows when you entered this field, you entered vowing an oath, or with the integrity that you're going to preserve children by any means possible. And this is just part of it."

Davies said she still respects child-care workers who choose not to get vaccinated, and maintains parents should feel safe sending their children to daycare given the new testing policy and other COVID-19 protocols in place, .

"I don't think in any way, shape, or form anyone in this field would ever do undue harm to another human being or child. So that's why there are protocols in place. That's why we have operational plans. We do what we can to provide a barrier," she said.

No one from the province was made available for an interview.

In an email to CBC News, a spokesperson said the province anticipates the vaccination rate among child-care workers "will increase as staff who had single vaccination get their second dose."

The province hopes to have updated data from child-care centres next week.

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