

Parents, daycare providers call on government for clear guidance on making child care settings safer ^[1]

'I have no way to make an informed decision about the safety of his daycare,' mother says

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EXCERPTS

Lisa Weighton kept her two-and-a half-year-old child home for an extra week after the holidays out of concern for her family's safety, as Omicron spread rapidly throughout the province.

"We thought there was a high risk that we would see increased rates of positive cases in his daycare, just like we would expect in the community," she said.

Three confirmed cases at their Victoria, B.C., daycare that week forced the facility to close, meaning Weighton had to stay home from work for another week to look after her child. Now, she worries about what will happen when the daycare reopens.

"I'm worried about if it's going to be more of the same if we're going to see more positive cases," she said.

"I have no way to make an informed decision about the safety of his daycare when he goes back, and it really feels like our family and our family alone has to make the choice between working or protecting our toddler and keeping him at home safe."

Meagan Brame, who owns a daycare in Esquimalt, says providers are "basically running blind" because they haven't been given clear operating guidelines during the most recent wave of the pandemic.

"Preschool age children and toddlers, they like to lick each other for lack of a better phrase," she said.

She says although daycares are required to have a certain amount of space available per child, kids want to play together, and physical distancing between each child is near impossible.

Additionally, daycare-age children aren't eligible for COVID-19 vaccination.

Brame and her staff are constantly cleaning and sanitizing surfaces. Staff and children are required to wear masks inside. They tell parents to keep kids home if they're sick.

"It's finding that balance of what is too sick to be at daycare," Brame said.

"I try to tell parents, if you look like this and went into the office would your coworkers say get out?"

Meanwhile, she said, schools are being given support and guidelines on how to manage as kids and teachers fall ill — and although daycares have been deemed an essential service, they don't get the same treatment.

Transparency, information and safety measures

Weighton says she wants the province to provide more transparency about exposure and transmission in child care settings so that parents can make informed decisions about when to keep their kids home.

The Ministry of Health says child care guidance is set by the Provincial Health Office and the B.C. Centre for Disease Control, and that those guidelines have been communicated.

"Generally, if children, regardless of vaccination status or exposure to COVID positive cases, have mild illness, they should stay away from school or child care settings until they feel well enough to resume their regular activities," the ministry said in an email to CBC.

"They can return to school, child care and other activities, when their symptoms resolve and they are better. They do not need a test, unless symptoms persist or worsen."

Earlier this week Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry said parents should lower the threshold for keeping kids home, and if they have a fever, they absolutely must stay home.

"Parents know kids, you know your kids, you know if they have symptoms that are concerning or worrisome and to keep them home," she said.

While keeping kids home when they're sick is helpful, Weighton would like to see N95 masks implemented in child care settings and mandatory vaccination for daycare staff. Brame adds that staff should be prioritized for booster shots.

"The kids really need child care, they need that socialization," Brame said.

"The parents need to be able to go to work. We are an essential service, so we are working really hard to stay open."

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: health and safety ^[4]

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