

# B.C. early childhood educators say they're overworked, under-resourced and feeling ignored<sup>[1]</sup>

Early childhood educators also call for rapid testing, access to boosters and PPE like N95 masks

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online<sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Early childhood educators say while the province has focused on keeping K-12 schools open during the pandemic, day cares haven't received as much attention despite being essential to the functioning of many families.

A letter from the Early Childhood Educators of B.C. to Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry says the recent delay to the start of school had a direct impact on the child-care sector, but they were not consulted.

"When we're not consulted on how that's going to affect the child-care sector we're left with a split second to try and figure out and manoeuvre what that means for child care," Christina Dicks of the Early Childhood Educators of B.C. said Wednesday on B.C. Today with Michelle Eliot.

"So we're being left out of that conversation, which is very challenging because I challenge you to meet a family that's not somehow affected by child care and the guidelines and COVID."

The Early Childhood Educators of B.C. are also calling for rapid testing, priority access to boosters and personal protective equipment, including N95 masks and other supports.

### Lack of communication

During a Tuesday press briefing, Henry said young children who have been in close contact with a positive case do not have to stay home and isolate if they're otherwise healthy.

"We need to help walk people through what that's going to look like in the coming days," Henry said.

Dicks said Henry's comments are not reflected in guidelines on the B.C. Centre for Disease Control website, which were last updated on Dec. 20. She said the latest guidance they received is that children who had close contact with a positive case had to isolate for 10 days.

She says the lack of communication over the change is yet another example of how their sector, which largely looks after kids too young to be vaccinated, remains an afterthought.

"People understand what happens with gyms and restaurants and schools, but you hear very little about child care and we're just left at the last minute to try and manoeuvre all the information that's not clear and concise," she said.

### Staffing and retention

Jean Petrovic, who runs Kool Cats Kid Care in Prince George, says she has recently had to deal with COVID-19 cases among staff, including someone who looks after kids.

"It reduces our numbers of staff compared to kids and if we get too low in that, we wouldn't be able to operate for the number of kids that we usually have attending," she said.

She said she is proud of her staff's effort and dedication, but the Omicron wave is taking a toll.

"I think they're just getting tired and worn out at this point," she said. "And now they have to pick it up again and keep the building clean and the equipment clean and keep the kids washing their hands and keeping their masks on. [It's] endless and I'm sure they're exhausted."

Dicks said the early childhood education sector, which covers a range of children from infants to kids as old as 12, has long dealt with significant staffing issues that have been worsened by the pandemic.

Earlier this month, Henry warned employers to prepare for the possibility that as much as "one-third of a workforce might be ill."

"That's not a possibility for licensed child-care providers," Amanda Worms, the owner-operator of Kelowna's Little Owl Academy, said.

"If we have a third of our staff gone, that means that there's a number of families that are impacted by that as we can't take those children that we have spaces for."

Dicks worries the current state of her industry will make it harder to recruit and retain staff.

"Quite frankly, there are educators that are leaving the field because it's all very much too overwhelming and the lack of acknowledgement, consultation and recognition just puts people over the top and it's just not worth it anymore," she said.

"As a whole, the sector has been really struggling around that piece, and I know there's lots of things happening to try and help that, but we're in crisis right now."

**Region:** British Columbia <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** COVID-19 <sup>[4]</sup>

child care workforce <sup>[5]</sup>

health and safety <sup>[6]</sup>

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