

# Child-care advocates call for public inquiry after E. coli outbreak at Calgary daycares <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online via Globe and Mail [free account registration] <sup>[2]</sup>

## Excerpts

Alberta's NDP critic for child care and children and family services, along with child-care advocates across the country, are calling on the provincial government to launch a full public inquiry into an E. coli outbreak at Calgary daycares that as of last week had climbed to 337 confirmed cases with 12 patients receiving care in hospital.

"It's the only way to ensure that the public gets the answers that are being raised through the devastating outbreak in Calgary and that we get some evidence-based and well-thought-through recommendations to ensure that this never happens again," says Morna Ballantyne, executive director of Child Care Now, a non-profit, national child-care advocacy organization.

A full public inquiry would not only shed light on how the outbreak happened and establish recommendations to help avoid any such incident in the future, but would also repair the trust in the care and feeding of such a vulnerable population that has been shaken among families across Canada, advocates say.

"I'm sure every parent with a child in daycare in this country over the past week or so has been asking questions of their daycares of how is food handled, how is food prepared. And I think an inquiry just by possibly restoring that trust would be worth it on that front alone," says Marni Flaherty, interim chief executive officer of the Canadian Child Care Federation.

Premier Danielle Smith said she is not ruling out a public inquiry.

"There's going to be a reckoning for sure with these facilities," she said in comments e-mailed to The Globe and Mail. "If there's some deficiency in our regulatory environment, we've got to correct that. So I'd be open to doing a more thorough investigation once we have some of those answers; whichever form it takes."

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John Greenhow, whose 2½-year-old son tested positive for E. coli as a result of the outbreak, is one of the many parents who are still looking for answers.

"An inquiry could draw better attention to the depths of betrayal of trust that surrounds this situation and the failure, ultimately, of the regulations surrounding these kitchens that serve vulnerable populations," he said.

Mr. Greenhow was part of a group of parents who last week sent an open letter to Ms. Smith asking, "What are you going to do to protect our most vulnerable citizens and support their families?"

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An inquiry is especially needed as the federal government's Early Learning and Child Care program continues throughout the country toward its goals of expanding publicly funded child care and reducing costs to an average of \$10 a day, said Susan Cake, chair of Child Care Now Alberta.

"There's a lot of government involvement at a variety of levels in child care now because we're trying to create a system. And so I think that a public inquiry that is transparent, that is hoping, that is looking at mending all of the harms that have been done would be a good step forward," she said.

**Related link:** The E.coli outbreak in Alberta shows why stringent public health measures matter <sup>[3]</sup>

Lessons from the massive daycare E.Coli outbreak in Calgary <sup>[4]</sup>

**Region:** Alberta <sup>[5]</sup>

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