

Daycare poisonings show high cost of red tape reduction ^[1]

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Excerpts

There are few things conservatives love more than talking about cutting “red tape” and some have even gone so far as to name cabinet ministers to that role. That includes Alberta, where Dale Nally, the “minister of red tape reduction”, has taken to bragging about how many regulations his government has removed since 2019. “Ultimately,” he told the *Medicine Hat News* in February, “red tape reduction is the unnecessary regulatory compliance that makes life difficult for job creators and Albertans.”

But as the more than 300 parents and children sickened by an E. coli outbreak at a series of Calgary daycares are finding out right now, the red tape getting cut can sometimes be what was protecting you from other people’s carelessness — or worse. A common kitchen owned by Fueling Minds that serves multiple affiliated daycare centres has been identified as the source of the outbreak, and it’s a minor miracle people didn’t get sick sooner. It’s had problems with Alberta Health Services (AHS) inspections dating back to 2021, when everything from unsafe dishwashers and improperly mixed sanitizer to food being transported without refrigeration and even an invalid food handling permit were noted by inspectors. Many of these problems were identified again during subsequent inspections, which speaks to the lack of compliance or any consequences flowing from it. On the most recent visit, AHS inspectors even found cockroaches — two live and more than 20 dead in sticky traps.

If this all sounds familiar, it should. There are echoes of the Walkerton E. coli outbreak in 2000, one that killed seven people in Ontario and sickened more than 2,000 after drinking water was contaminated by agricultural runoff. Lax testing and monitoring by the Walkerton Public Utilities Commission was ultimately identified as one of the contributing factors behind the outbreak, along with the failure of the provincial government to properly enforce its regulations.

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One of the key lessons contained in the two-volume report from the Walkerton Inquiry was the need for redundancy in certain areas of regulatory oversight. “Redundancy was an essential lesson of the Walkerton inquiry, that we need to have in place safeguards so that if something goes wrong at one level, you can catch it at the next level,” Theresa McClenaghan, the executive director and counsel for the Canadian Environmental Law Association, told the CBC in 2020.

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Time will tell whether this latest E. coli outbreak finally drives that point home for Canada’s red-tape-obsessed conservatives.

Related link: Child-care advocates call for public inquiry after E. coli outbreak at Calgary daycares ^[3]

The E.coli outbreak in Alberta shows why stringent public health measures matter ^[4]

Region: Alberta ^[5]

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