

More than 20% of Alta. daycares serving food haven't been inspected in more than a year, documents reveal ^[1]

Province is failing to meet its own child-care inspection guidelines, analysis shows

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

At a time when Canada is vastly expanding its child-care system, and just eight months after a major E. coli outbreak in Calgary child-care centres, an Alberta Health Services analysis shows the province is lagging in its rate of daycare inspections, falling short of its guideline of at least one health and safety inspection per year at each of the province's licensed daycare centres.

The report, titled Safe Healthy Environments – Childcare Inspection Analysis and obtained under freedom of information, is worrying to the mother of a child hospitalized during last year's outbreak and concerning to public health experts who say the lag in inspection rates is putting kids at risk.

It shows 354 licensed daycares with food facilities did not see an inspection in the 12 months before March 18, 2024. That's just over 20 per cent of Alberta daycares with food services.

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Alberta Health Services wrote in an email to CBC News that the role of public health inspectors is to identify hazards and provide education and direction. It said inspectors work to correct violations through ongoing communication and reinspection.

AHS says it has not issued any fines or prosecutions.

Alberta has about 200 public health inspectors responsible for ensuring safety at a wide range of facilities including long term care, restaurants, food trucks, shelters, public housing, nail salons, tattoo parlours and child-care centres.

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Concerns about cutting corners

Concerns about inspections come at a time when Alberta's child-care system is seeing a massive expansion.

The federal government is pouring \$3.8 billion into lowering daycare costs and adding 68,700 new spaces in Alberta by 2026.

The number of children attending daycare in Alberta has already soared by about 35 thousand since 2021, according to the province.

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The double whammy

Mike Parker, the head of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta representing health inspectors in the province, worries that his members can't keep up.

"We don't have the inspectors on the streets today to do the work," he said.

According to the most recent annual report from AHS, the total number of food safety inspections has fallen by about fifteen thousand per year since 2018.

Parker says the problem is a growing number of facilities to inspect, coupled with demands to reinspect some places multiple times.

"That's the double whammy," he said. "Our members are stretched, trying to get to as many as they can."

"Our kids are vulnerable to this when we can't ensure their safety."

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Source URL (modified on 5 Jun 2024): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/24/06/more-20-alta-daycares-serving-food-havent-been-inspected-more-year>

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