

Planning for a Critical (Red) Level under the Pandemic Response System in Early Learning and Child Care Facilities

Manitoba's [Pandemic Response System](#) sets out specific and focused public health responses on a provincial, regional, community, and business or sector basis that can scale up or down depending on the risk of COVID-19 at that time. Essential services will remain up and running at all times, while following public health and workplace safety guidance. This includes: health services; emergency services; utilities and essential goods transport. Schools, child care centres, post-secondary, training and critical government services will remain open with delivery models adjusted to each response level.

If a region moves to the Critical (red) level under the Pandemic Response System, extensive community transmission is occurring and is not contained, there are widespread outbreaks and new clusters that cannot be controlled through testing and contact tracing, and the virus is being transmitted at levels that public health and the health system deem concerning or critical. Additional public health measures would be required in early learning and child care facilities to reduce the risk of COVID-19.

Public health officials will provide more detailed information about the changes to child care services as part of the pandemic response. Some of the restrictions may include:

- Centres may be restricted to a maximum group size of 16 children to operate as an exclusive cohort.
- Larger facilities with segregated rooms and multiple separate external entrances may be able to care for additional cohorts of 16, with staff exclusively providing care to one cohort.
- Smaller centres with up to 16 children and home-based providers may remain open and operate under current directives from public health.

At the Critical (red) response level, child care facilities may be required to close or suspend services, or they may be required to provide restricted services with priority given to front-line health care providers and other critical services workers (CSW).

As part of your planning process, child care facilities should consider:

- the number of CSW families currently enrolled within your facility who will need their child(ren) to attend child care at this response level;
- how many additional children of CSW families your facility could accommodate, while maintaining public health directives regarding cohorts;
- the number of CSW families currently on your enrolment waitlist;
- opportunities to partner with schools to provide before and after school care for children of CSWs registered in Grades K-6;
- ways to maximize the use of existing centre space and determine if additional space is required;

- a process to identify additional space available that meets current health and safety guidelines provided by Public Health and the licensing requirements under Manitoba Child Care Regulation 62/86; and
- opportunities to move existing licensed spaces to smaller satellite sites located in community settings and/or homes to expand the number of cohorts that the facility may care for under current public health directives.

In a Critical (red) response, schools are expected to be closed with teacher-led remote learning taking place. Children of CSWs in Kindergarten to Grade 6 would be the exception, and would continue to participate in in-school learning. Schools would work collaboratively with co-located child care centres to ensure that child care services can continue. Guidelines would allow multiple groups to operate in a school setting at the same time, if they can be segregated. It is unlikely child care facilities will experience a situation similar to the spring of 2020, where all child care centres across Manitoba were closed.

Directives from the Department of Families and guidelines developed with public health officials will provide additional guidance related to infection control measures and use of personal protective equipment. All child care facilities will continue to receive regular communication from the department, so continue to check email frequently for the most current public health information.

Visit <https://manitoba.ca/covid19/protection/childcare.html> for up-to-date information.

Facilities should continue to use the Manitoba Child Care Search tool, which was developed to support access to available child care as part of Manitoba's COVID-19 pandemic response. Child care facilities should update their information online at www.manitoba.ca/childcaresearch to ensure that families can locate available spaces.

This document does not provide answers for all individual situations. Child care facilities will need to consider how to best integrate this guidance within their local realities and specific situations.

Understanding Provincial- and Local- Level Decision-Making Responsibilities

Successfully responding to the challenges caused by the pandemic needs clear communication and responsibilities.

The following chart sets out critical elements of our response and whether the province or individual child care facilities are responsible for the decision-making to address it.

Issue	Decision-Making Responsibility	
	Department of Families	Child Care Facility
1. Creating the definition of a Critical Services Worker.	X	
2. Applying the definition of a Critical Services Worker to a local context.		X
3. Developing a standard form for Critical Services Worker parents/guardians to complete.	X	
4. Determining the number of children with at least one parent/guardian who is a Critical Services Worker in the child care facility.		X
5. Determining the child care facility's capacity for staff and children while maintaining two metres of physical distancing.		X
6. Assessing whether existing regulations, policies and legislation support capacity assessments and physical distancing.	X	

Critical Services Worker Definition

In a Critical (red) response, available child care spaces will be prioritized for Manitobans who provide critical services and who cannot find alternate child care arrangements. Facilities may not immediately have space to accommodate children of all CSWs, while maintaining two metres of physical distancing. Therefore, a prioritization system is needed.

Priority access will be given to health care providers. Other CSWs will be eligible and prioritized by child care facilities:

1. Health and health services
2. Child care workers (early childhood educators, child care assistants, centre administrators and support staff)
3. Kindergarten-to-Grade 12 education providers (teachers, administrators and support staff)
4. Law enforcement
5. Corrections workers
6. Fire and paramedic first responders
7. Direct social services and child protection workers

Child care facilities can then consider other Critical Service Providers, which may include people who provide essential services to Manitobans, such as frontline natural resource workers, gas station attendants, grocery store staff, and hospital/clinic support staff, such as cleaners and those listed in [The Essential Services Act](#).