

## Program/Service Information Report

# 2023 Calgary Childcare Outbreak

## Food Safety Updates

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**To:** Board of Health

**Meeting Date:** June 5, 2024

**Report No.:** BH.01.JUN0524.C11

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## Key Points

- In September 2023 Shigatoxigenic Escherichia coli (STEC) impacted 11 childcare facilities in Calgary, AB from food from a central kitchen. 446 cases were linked to the outbreak; 38 children and one adult were hospitalized, with 23 patients diagnosed with hemolytic uremic syndrome. Meatloaf and vegan loaf served on August 29 were identified as the most probable source of illness.
- STEC is a bacterial infection spread by consuming contaminated food or water. Symptoms include diarrhea, abdominal cramps, bloody diarrhea, and hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS).
- In 2023, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) inspected all 65 licensed childcare centers. Forty-six (46) prepared food on-site. Nineteen (19) served meals prepared off-site by caterers. Childcare centers that served meals from caterers or central kitchens had fewer infractions during their inspections than childcare centers that prepared their meals.
- Foodborne illness outbreaks related to caterers or central kitchens can impact more people over a larger geographic area (often cross-jurisdictional).
- Childcare centers using caterer and central kitchen services should monitor them for food safety performance and check meals against food safety criteria upon arrival.
- Public Health Inspectors (PHI) provide hands-on education during childcare center, catering, and central kitchen inspections. When food safety infractions are identified, effective solutions are applied by the PHI and the operator.
- WDGPH is developing additional web-based support for such settings in 2024.

## Compliance with OPHS and Accountability Indicators:

In compliance

Not in compliance

## Highlights

WDGPH inspects 65 licensed childcare centers and 75 before-and-after-school programs. Food served at the Before-and-After School programs is limited primarily to low-risk or pre-packaged foods. Childcare centers are categorized as low, moderate, or high risk. The inspection frequency depends on the risk categorization.

Table 1 presents the risk categorization of key characteristics of each risk category.

Risk Level	#	Description
High Risk	39	Minimum of three inspections per year. Complex menus or a greater number of food preparation steps. Moderate-risk premises with several or critical food safety issues may be recategorized as high risk.
Moderate Risk	25	Minimum of two inspections per year. Basic food preparation. Low-risk premises with several or critical food safety issues may be recategorized as moderate risk.
Low Risk	1	Minimum of one inspection per year. Restricted to pre-packaged, low-risk (shelf-stable) food items.

Table 2 shows how in 2023, childcare centers serving meals from outside sources experienced fewer infractions per inspection when compared to childcare centers conducting internal food preparation.

	Perform Food Preparation	Catered Meals / Central Kitchens
Total # of inspections conducted	127	43
Total # of critical infractions	6	1
Total # of critical CDIs*	6	1
Total # of non-critical infractions	19	3
Total # of non-critical CDIs	12	1
Total # of critical infractions & critical CDIs per inspection	12/127 = <b>0.94</b>	2/43 = <b>0.05</b>
Total # of <b>all infractions / CDIs</b> per Inspection	43/127 = <b>0.34</b>	6/43 = <b>0.14</b>
*CDI = item was 'Corrected During Inspection'		

Nineteen childcare centers in WDG have contracted food services. Of these contactors, five caterers or central kitchens are used in the area.

Two of these caterers are in the WDG area and inspected by WDGPH. The other three catering firms are in the Greater Toronto Area and not inspected by WDGPH as they are outside the WDGPH jurisdiction. Childcare centers need to consider the following when selecting a caterer or central kitchen to contract meal purchases:

- Advanced food safety training is required for management and supervisors.
- Food Safety Management System (such as HACCP) in place and audited.
- Consistent compliance history with local public health.
- Allergen program in place.
- Supplier controls in place that ensure only approved quality suppliers and ingredients.
- Willingness to allow childcare center management to tour kitchen facilities.
- Written contract with insurance coverage, regulatory compliance, and issue resolution.

Childcare centers need to implement on-site food-receiving procedures to manage food safety risks related to their caterer or central kitchen:

- Monitor and record incoming product temperatures.
- Verify product temperature when it leaves the caterer (caterer should include outbound temperature logs with delivery).
- Monitor the condition and cleanliness of vehicles and product packaging.
- Maintain backup meal options if a delivery is rejected for food safety reasons.

In 2024, WDGPH is undertaking a project to develop and make available food safety program templates and guides at [www.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca](http://www.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca). These materials will support childcare operators in implementing stronger food safety management systems in their centers.

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<b>Prepared By:</b>	Paul Medeiros, Manager, Environmental Health
<b>Approved By:</b>	Christopher Beveridge, CD, MA, CPHI(C) Vice President, Health Protection and Emergency Preparedness
<b>Submitted By:</b>	Dr. Nicola J. Mercer, MD, MBA, MPH, FRCPC Medical Officer of Health & CEO

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