

When we first started to hear about COVID-19 on the news, I never believed the impact it could have on our communities, homes, schools and workplaces. I didn't really understand the impact that it would have on our day to day lives. And then on March 15th, 2020 Governor Walz closed schools across the state. Teachers had to switch to distance learning to keep themselves and their students safe from contracting COVID-19. I thought that meant that I would also be staying home. Instead, the program I work for, Discovery Club, closed and instead became Essential Kids Care, EKC. We provided childcare for Tier 1 essential workers at the beginning of the pandemic. It was a terrifying feeling to continue to physically go into work when it seemed that everyone around me was staying home.

The news was always telling us to stay home and stay safe. How could I stay safe if I was still going into work and exposing myself to the children of healthcare workers, law enforcement, first responders and other public health workers? My risk of contracting COVID-19 felt high during this time and I continue to worry because we still care for these children. During the school closures, staff working in childcare were exposed to many different children and staff, not knowing where they had been and if they were carrying the virus into school. The worrying and stress for childcare workers during this time was at an all-time high. I personally, was scared of bringing home COVID-19 to my parents, with whom I share a house. They were both working from home during the pandemic and both have an underlying condition. This only added to home life stress.

Our program went through many changes and many COVID-19 protocols, changing our roles at work and what was expected of us. We had to start sanitizing materials and furniture, complete health screenings, sit with sick children, complete distance learning work, offer technology support and much, much more. Our shifts were also changed numerous times and our sites changed many times. For me personally, I have been at seven different sites since schools closed in March 2020. During a typical year, I work at two different sites and have a set schedule. I do not even know how many different children and staff I have come into contact with during the pandemic. That means a lot of unnecessary exposures.

While at work, I was exposed to COVID-19 and so were the children of the group. We all had to quarantine for seven days. I was one of the lucky ones and only had to quarantine once. I know other staff that were not as fortunate and had to quarantine multiple times. Using all of their COVID leave time.

Childcare workers played an important role during the pandemic. We were a dedicated group of staff committed to risking our health to care for the children of others. We were not in the hospitals directly fighting COVID-19, but we were caring for the children of the doctors, nurses, and first responders so that they were able to care for the people with COVID.

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