

4,800 nurses will strike Sunday at 5 Twin Cities hospitals

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Around 4,800 nurses are preparing to launch a one-week strike at five hospitals in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area in a dispute over health insurance.

Minnesota Nurses Association members plan to walk out at 7 a.m. Sunday at hospitals operated by Allina Health—Abbott Northwestern in Minneapolis, Mercy in Coon Rapids, United in St. Paul, Unity in Fridley, and the Phillips Eye Institute in Minneapolis. Allina says it plans to keep the facilities operating close to normally with a smaller staff of replacement nurses.

Officials on both sides said Friday that there was no chance of averting the walkout.

"It's disappointing and disheartening and not where we wanted to be, but this is where we are, so I do think that's inevitable," said Dr. Penny Wheeler, president and CEO of Allina Health.

MNA spokesman Rick Fuentes said the two sides planned to meet Friday, but only to discuss procedures for returning to work.

No new negotiations were scheduled on the main dispute over Allina's effort to switch union nurses to the same [health insurance](#) plans as more than 30,000 other Allina employees and their family members, which carry lower monthly premiums but higher out-of-pocket costs. The union says the company won't budge.

"What we really want is them to come back to the table and actually negotiate with us," said Angie Becchetti, a nurse at Abbott Northwestern.

The company says the move would encourage more frugal use of healthcare, thus cutting its costs by \$10 million a year.

Other unresolved issues include nurse-to-patient staffing ratios and workplace safety. On pay, Allina is offering nurses 2 percent wage increases in each of three years. The union has proposed 3 percent raises in each of those years.

MNA members voted by a more than 66 percent to reject the company's most recent offer and authorize the strike. Their current contract expired May 31.

Allina has lined up 1,450 replacement nurses, many from other states. Some elective procedures may be cancelled during the walkout, but the company says there will not be a significant drop in hospital services.

"We feel very confident about the care we're able to provide ... with the replacement nurses coming in," Wheeler said.

The last major Twin Cities nurses strike was in 2010, when 12,000 [nurses](#) walked out at 14 metropolitan area hospitals for one day. Nurses at the other Twin Cities hospital systems reached contract agreements months ago.

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