

## **Interim Guidance on Prioritizing Child Safety and Conducting Visits During COVID-19 Outbreak**

The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, poses an unprecedented challenge to the Department of Children and Families' operations. There are crucial functions we must carry out to fulfill our responsibility to keep children safe, especially at a time when they are less visible in the community and therefore, more vulnerable. In order to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 while maintaining our core operations, we must prioritize our responsibilities and collaborate to accomplish critical agency functions and roles.

While information about COVID-19 is emerging, the CDC has identified that older adults and those with underlying health conditions or a weakened immune system are at higher risk for developing complications from COVID-19. We recognize that you may fall in to one of these high-risk categories and recommend that you work with your Supervisor and Manager to develop alternative plans for making in-person visits. Most importantly, if you are sick or have a fever you should not come to work.

### **Contacting Children and Families**

With schools and childcare centers closing and parents experiencing higher levels of stress for a variety of reasons, including potential loss of work, it is increasingly important for us to remain in contact with our children and families to assess safety and address imminent needs they may have.

**Make Contact on Your Assigned Cases** Please check in with the children, young adults, parents, and foster parents you are assigned to, either by phone or by using FaceTime. For guidance on how to FaceTime or other tools to support telework, click [here](#). This is a very stressful time for children and families and our work is assessing how they are doing, including determining any safety or risk factors that may be present or increased because of new circumstances. If you identify any emergency situations, talk to your supervisor and manager immediately about next steps.

**Meet with Your Supervisor to Prioritize Cases** After you have made contact with your families, plan to meet with your supervisor to discuss your cases and any imminent situations that require follow up. This meeting does not have to occur in person and can be done by phone or WebEx. In discussing your cases, you and your supervisor should discuss the following:

- Age of the children, including sibling groups
- Date of last face-to-face contact with children
- Level of risk identified in the Risk Assessment tool
- Any contributing factors present in the case, including substance use, mental health concerns and domestic violence
- Any urgent needs the family may have, like childcare, medical care, medication availability or financial stressors.

During this process, if you identify any imminent situations that necessitate a face-to-face contact, you and your supervisor should discuss next steps with your manager. Together you, your supervisor, and manager can make a plan for making safe, face-to-face contact.

### **Conducting Safe Visits in the Field**

Visits with children, families and foster/kin caregivers are a critical part of DCF's responsibility to protect children and ensure their safety. The following guidelines should be utilized when conducting home visits during responses, visits for ongoing cases and to foster homes/group homes/congregate care facilities.

**Plan Your Contact/Visit** If a situation arises where face-to-face contact is needed, talk with your supervisor and manager to develop a plan for making the contact. Whenever possible before going out to a visit, call the family and ask the following screening questions regarding members of their household. If you are unable to call the family before a home visit, or it is intended to be an unannounced visit, ask these screening questions regarding all household members before you enter the home and

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conduct your visit:

- Are you or anyone in your household sick with fever (Higher than 100.3°F) or newly developed respiratory illness such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat?
- Have you traveled internationally (i.e., within the past 14 days) to a [COVID-19-affected geographic area](#)?
- Have you had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days?

If someone answers yes to one of these questions, talk with your supervisor and manager for next steps. Your manager can reach out to the DCF Medical Team to discuss the situation further. It is still important for us to assess safety and risk in the families we work with, and your supervisor, manager and the medical team can help strategize the best and safest way for us to make contact with a family.

We are encouraging foster parents to ask screening questions of any visitors to their home, so they may also ask you the same screening questions listed above.

For visits to congregate care facilities, facility staff will ask you screening questions before you are able to visit. Because the spread of COVID-19 can occur rapidly in these environments, facilities are utilizing [this guidance](#) to protect the children in their care.

**Minimize  
Duplicative  
Contacts When  
Possible**

Often, foster parents or congregate care/group care facilities care for multiple children in DCF care. When this occurs, we recommend coordinating with the workers assigned and conducting a single visit to reduce the number of visitors in homes or facilities. At this time, other visits may be conducted by phone or FaceTime when child safety considerations permit. Supervisors and Managers can work together for this to occur across units and agency functions.

**Safety  
Precautions to  
Take During and  
After Home Visits**

Whenever a DCF Worker visits a family's home, they should take common-sense precautions to reduce their exposure to COVID-19. These include:

- Avoid touching surfaces in the family's home as much as possible. Use a tissue to touch a surface when needed.
- Avoid shaking hands with family members or engaging in other forms of physical greetings.
- Maintain a distance of six feet between yourself and family members during home visits whenever possible.
- Clean and sanitize your hands after each home visit by washing your hands with soap and warm water or using hand sanitizer or sanitizing wipes.
- Clean and disinfect your home, car, and workspace with alcohol or bleach-based products often.
- Clean and disinfect your clothes often.
- Avoid touching your face.