



Allegheny County Department of Human Services Office of Children, Youth and Families

COVID-19 FAQs

General Prevention

The Allegheny County DHS Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) values our partnership with you in service to the youth and families in our community. We are writing to share decisions that have been made regarding our organizational response to the COVID-19 outbreak with services you provide.

We are closely monitoring updates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as local and regional health authorities. We are implementing recommended preventative measures to maintain safe work conditions and prevent the spread of the virus. We request, if you have not done so already, you do the same. This includes your agency's own emergency response plan for infectious diseases. This includes reviewing each child's case with child and family teams (including caseworker) and identifying essential needs and the services and functions required to meet them.

For more information regarding Coronavirus, we encourage you to review the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html> and particularly these two pages:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/index.html>

Child Placing Agencies

What planning should we be doing regarding prevention and potential disruptions in service?

Group care and foster care providers deliver essential services that keep at-risk children safe. To mitigate against risk of disruption in service, please engage in prevention and continuity-of-operations planning immediately. OCYF encourages providers to stay open as feasible to meet the needs of children and families. We want staff to feel safe in supporting continuing services. Please ensure that cleaning and safety protocols are disseminated widely and that measures are taken to disinfect spaces regularly.

For support in planning, please contact Rebecca Palatino at Rebecca.Palatino@AlleghenyCounty.US.

Anyone seeking additional information about prevention and COVID-19 is encouraged to call the PA United Way 24/7 COVID-19 Hotline at 1-888-856-2774 or visit <http://www.pa211sw.org/covid-19/>

What happens if we don't have enough staff to maintain our normal operational capacity?

Communicate immediately with Rebecca.Palatino@AlleghenyCounty.US.

What are the next steps if we are modifying our services due to COVID-19 impacts?

Communicate immediately with Rebecca Palatino at Rebecca.Palatino@AlleghenyCounty.US to discuss modifications in services due to COVID-19.

Please also share any documentation/resources you have developed such as notices or letters to families, staffing plans and attendance, plans for providing alternative services, etc. with Rebecca Palatino.

As an alternative to closing, what are the options available to provide alternative services to accommodate children and families?

If you have determined that you are unable to provide full contracted services for children and families, please consult Rebecca Palatino regarding alternative services rather than reducing or stopping services all together. This will allow you to continue to support children and families in some way and will also give staff an opportunity to keep working.

Examples/Ideas of Alternative Services:

- Virtual check-ins with families for support and goal setting/check ins (i.e. Skype, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, emails, text messaging and phone calls)
- Providing food, resources, and other information to families

What do we do if staff call in sick and it causes a staff shortage?

Although you may experience a staff shortage, if staff call in sick or present with symptoms, they must not come in to work.

Monitor the situation, contact Rebecca Palatino, and communicate with families immediately, including an expected re-open date if possible, as well as contact information during the shortage.

For service modifications and questions: email Rebecca.Palatino@AlleghenyCounty.US

Please also share any documentation/resources you have developed such as notices or letters to families, staffing plans and attendance, plans for providing alternative services, etc. with your provider relations monitor.

What happens if it's time for a home visit and we are closed or a family cancels due to prevention or outbreak?

Connect with the family by phone or other alternative method (such as text messaging, video call options, or online platforms) whenever it is possible. If it is not possible, reschedule for a later date.

Additional Examples/Ideas of Alternative Services:

Virtual check-ins with families for support and goal setting/check ins (i.e. Skype, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, emails, text messaging and phone calls)

Home Visiting Contractors

Please note that providers of home visiting models, such as Homebuilders and PACT, have provided guidance about the model-approved adaptations for engaging families.

The guidance is as follows:

1. Check with your state and other funders – hopefully all will allow “tele health” activities instead of face-to-face in-home to be paid as face-to-face if people are asked to stay at home, when health of client and/or therapist is at risk, when social distancing isn't possible etc.
2. Follow the CDC and state health guidelines and advice regarding prevention (e.g., washing hands, use of hand sanitizer, social distance etc), and share this with families, as well as info about hotlines or other health care info.
3. Homebuilders and PACT standards are being flexed to allow:
 - a. Video (and phone, though video is preferred) sessions in place of in-home sessions. Our paperwork and data system will be changed today to be able to document video “FF” sessions. We will let you know when this happens – hopefully by the end of the day today (3/19/2020). You will need to check with clients to see what internet and video calling access they have (and hopefully help them get it if they don't already have it.)
 - b. Hours may be lower than typical since providers will likely not be providing transportation to families, going to court or other visits with families. Driving clients is difficult because of social distance recommendations.
 - c. For Homebuilders, extensions approved by supervisor and consultant to 6 weeks if needed, in order to have more hours and contact with the family; and in some cases beyond 6 weeks with the approval of the consultant.
 - d. It is important for the agency supervisors and their program managers (not our consultants) to determine if the situation is safe enough to NOT do home visits or see family members in person – factors to consider: age of child, reason for referral, current safety concerns, if there are protective adults in the home, other supports and services. If the supervisor in consultation with their program manager does not think it is safe enough, they need to consult with your referents know and close the case (and I assume the child(ren) would be placed for Homebuilders). For PACT cases, since they should not be at such high risk of harm, we assume most/all can be seen via a video call.

- e. If meeting face-to-face, follow the prevention guidelines regarding hand sanitizing and social distancing, not going if sick, or client is sick etc. – if homes aren't set up for social distancing, consider meeting in a park or outdoor location.
- f. If families need concrete services or help with basic needs– food, diapers etc.– hopefully this can be done online and sent to family. Or the therapist could deliver and leave outside the home.

In order to do “tele health” therapists and families will need internet connection and possibly devices (phone, tablets etc.).

OCYF acknowledges there may be other barriers to participation virtually, such as access to technology or phone minutes for either the family or program, staff training on data and information security on new technology platforms, or data systems limitations to track content discussed during a virtual visit. Your organization may be well equipped or newly considering these options. Please reach out to Rebecca Palatino for additional information.

As you have other questions, please send them to Rebecca Palatino at Rebecca.Palatino@AlleghenyCounty.US