



Guidance for NJ DCF-Linked Programs in Response to COVID-19

March 12, 2020

Dear System Partners,

Governor Murphy's recent declaration of a State of Emergency related to the COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus allows state agencies to access and utilize additional resources to assist with the prevention, mitigation, containment and recovery related to the Novel Coronavirus. Pandemic planning is underway. The Governor's Office and the New Jersey Department of Health are issuing guidance and will continue to do so on an ongoing basis.

At this time, the designation of a State of Emergency does not affect normal day-to-day operations at DCF. As such, contracted and licensed entities should expect to be able to interact with DCF staff and the department's sub-divisions without interruption.

Programs may experience additional challenges resulting from the ongoing response to the Coronavirus. The below guidelines, based on information from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as the New Jersey Department of Health, are intended to assist you with your own operational questions during these challenging times. Please note that the Department of Health regularly updates its [dedicated COVID-19 Coronavirus website](#) with the latest information available. Additionally, the Department of Health is managing a 24-hour toll-free hotline—1-800-222-1222 – and email address (ncov@doh.nj.gov) staffed by health care professionals and representatives from DCF and other State Departments, who are available to answer any questions you have about the Novel Coronavirus.

A. Guidance for Engaging Program Clients

Pursuant to the terms of the agencies' contracts with DCF, contracted service providers are expected to continue to serve clients during the designated State of Emergency. Proper precautions and appropriate pre-screening may be utilized. DCF-contracted agencies may ask clients the following three questions prior to scheduling an appointment:

- 1) In the last 14 days, have you or anyone in your household traveled to a country for which the CDC has issued [a Level 2 or Level 3 travel designation](#)?
- 2) Have you or anyone in your household come into contact with any person under investigation (PUI) for exposure to the COVID-19 Coronavirus (high-risk and medium-risk under [the NJ Department of Health guidelines](#)), or anyone with known COVID-19?
- 3) Do you have any symptoms of a respiratory infection (e.g. cough, sore throat, fever or shortness of breath)?

If a client answers “no” to both Question 1 and 2, providers are expected to continue to serve the client according to usual business practices. Client presentation with symptoms of respiratory infection alone (indicated by a “yes” to Question 3) is not an acceptable reason to cease or interrupt service to the client.

If a client answers “yes” to either Question 1 or 2, but “no” to question 3 (they have not exhibited symptoms of a respiratory infection), you may determine whether or not services can be safely and effectively extended remotely via teleconference (Skype, Zoom, etc...) or telemedicine, if it is available, or if the client does not have an urgent need, you may contact your DCF contract administrator for additional guidance.

If a client answers “yes” to either Question 1 or 2 and is exhibiting symptoms similar to those of a respiratory infection:

- Advise the client to remain at home, and to contact their medical professional immediately. Alternatively, the client may be directed to the nearest emergency room for medical treatment and testing;
- Notify the client to inform the receiving medical provider, transporter, or facility of a potential concern for COVID-19. This should be done in advance of arriving at the medical facility or being picked up by the medical transport so that these professionals can take proper precautions to prevent the spread of the disease.
- In the event that a client requires medical attention for possible exposure to COVID-19, please inform DCF through your regular point of contact with the Department.

B. Guidance for Residential Programs Funded by, and/or Licensed By, NJ DCF

Guidance for screening visitors/members of the public to DCF facilities, residential and non-residential programs funded, licensed or regulated by DCF:

The below protocol is applicable to any facility or program that receives visitors or members of the public as a part of its daily operations.

- All facilities, programs and offices receiving regular in-person contact with members of the public should immediately develop policies to schedule and pre-screen over the telephone all visits by non-client/residents-or-staff entities, including families, attorneys, case managers and social workers, using the three questions above.
- Upon screening, if a potential visitor answers “Yes” to any of the three questions above, please politely instruct them not to visit the facility, program or office until the specific scenario can be further assessed.
 - For those potential visitors who answer “Yes” to questions 1 OR 2, but “No” to question 3 (i.e., reports no symptoms of a respiratory infection), please also instruct them to contact their local Department of Health for further direction.
 - For those potential visitors who answer “Yes” to questions 1 OR 2, AND also “Yes” to question 3, (i.e., reports having symptoms) please also instruct

them to immediately contact their medical provider and Local Health Department, and to call 911 if they are experiencing serious symptoms (e.g., shortness of breath). Please also instruct the screened individual to notify the receiving medical provider and transporter in advance of potential concern for COVID-19.

- If facilities/program providers receive unscheduled visitors, either politely instruct them to leave and call to schedule a visit, or screen them appropriately before allowing entrance into the facility/program.
 - If upon screening, the unscheduled visitor answers “Yes” to any of the questions above, ask that they contact their own medical professional immediately. Alternatively, they may be referred to the nearest emergency room for immediate attention.
- In all circumstances above, please also instruct the screened individual to notify the receiving medical provider and transporter in advance of potential concern for COVID-19.

*** PLEASE NOTE – Screening for current residents at facilities or residential programs funded, licensed or regulated by DCF (including Domestic Violence and other shelters, Children’s System of Care providers, Mommy and Me providers, and any other residential setting):**

All residential facilities funded, licensed or regulated by DCF should be certain to also screen any incoming residents using the guidance above, and should respond accordingly if a resident is experiencing symptoms and responds “Yes” to questions 1 AND 2 above. If a current or incoming resident can answer “Yes” to questions 1, 2, AND 3:

- Provide a mask for the recipient of services/resident;
- Isolate the recipient of services/resident in a private room with the door closed if possible and ensure that they are kept separate from other tenants.
- A program medical provider should then immediately assess the individual using appropriate PPE if possible, or if no qualified program medical provider is available, the person should be asked to contact their own medical professional immediately. The programs should also contact the local Department of Health for further recommendations including transport to their recommended medical facility if necessary. Please also instruct the program to notify the receiving medical provider and transporter in advance of potential concern for COVID-19

All residential facilities funded, licensed or regulated by DCF should continue to review their own emergency preparedness plans and assess for continued operation in case of an emergency.

- All facilities and programs should assess both their facility and workforce capacity to accommodate the potential need for an increased number of isolations rooms and the potential decrease in staffing availability.
- As a result of the above assessment, programs may need to prioritize service provision and planning.

- If the needs of the facility/program exceed current capacity or ability, please contact the relevant DCF offices.

C. Guidance for Childcare Centers

The Department of Health has established [guidelines for schools and childcare centers](#) when responding to potential cases of COVID-19 among the student body and staff; these Department of Health guidelines for schools and childcare centers supersede the guidance issued in this communication.

Program dismissal and closure is an important nonpharmaceutical intervention strategy to help stop the spread of the Novel Coronavirus within the community. Childcare program administrators should work closely with local health officials when making decisions around dismissals or closures.

Please email askdcf@dcf.nj.gov in the event that prolonged program closure due to legitimate concerns around the spread of the Coronavirus destabilizes a program's financial sustainability, and with decisions around dismissal or closure. A representative from DCF will follow up on your request for assistance.

D. Licensing and Regulatory Guidelines

During the State of Emergency related to the spread of the COVID-19 Coronavirus, DCF acknowledges that flexibility around regular licensing and regulatory guidelines may be warranted and necessary, so long as such flexibility does not jeopardize the safety or wellness of children being served by the program.

In the interest of preserving operations at licensed and contracted programs that may be experiencing hardship due to meeting staffing levels, remediation timelines and other challenges exasperated by a public health emergency, issues will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine if a licensing or regulatory waiver may be appropriate.

Please email askdcf@dcf.nj.gov with detailed information about the challenges faced by your program in order to request a review for a licensing/regulatory waiver from the DCF Office of Licensing.

CSOC contracted out of home treatment providers should ensure that their provider agency contact information is updated and maintained in Cyber.

Thank you, as always, for your partnership on behalf of New Jersey's children and families, and for your patience and understanding as we continue to respond to this public health crisis. We will continue to monitor the situation, and will share information with you if and as circumstances change. If you have any questions or need clarification, please email askdcf@dcf.nj.gov for assistance.

Sincerely,
-Christine

Christine Norbut Beyer
Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Children and Families