



DCFS Response to COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions for Contracted Providers

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is working closely with the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and health officials to address Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) concerns and to help prevent its spread. This is a challenging time for the community and many are fearful or anxious. When you hear, read, or watch news about an outbreak of an infectious disease, these types of pandemic concerns naturally create a sense of fear and anxiety. In these circumstances, it is important to know what measures can be taken to minimize disruption and preserve our ability to continue to care for Los Angeles County's children and families. You are valued partners in the care of our children and we want to ensure that you have access to accurate information and guidance to minimize the risk of infection and further transmission of COVID-19.

You may have seen or heard the news about several developments in the State's response which are specifically designed to slow the spread of COVID-19. On March 19, 2020, the County of Los Angeles issued a public health order directing residents to refrain from gathering in enclosed spaces with more than 10 people. First responders and those in healthcare, government, food services, and other essential industries are exempt from this order. The order directs businesses deemed nonessential, such as retail stores and malls, to close temporarily. California Governor Gavin Newsom issued a similar order (copy linked [here](#)) for all counties in the State, following the County and City of Los Angeles. However, during times of extreme uncertainty like this, children and families across the County rely on us for support even more than they do under normal circumstances. Therefore, while non-essential businesses are now temporarily closed, as an essential service provider, DCFS operations will not be suspended.

We remain committed to maintaining timely reunification and sibling bonding for our children and families. Please be advised that, on March 21, 2020, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) provided Counties throughout California with guidance and updated requirements for County child welfare workers and juvenile probation officers regarding the provision of services to children and families during the evolving situation related to COVID-19 in **All County Letter (ACL) No. 20-25** (copy linked [here](#)). That guidance has now been incorporated into the questions and answers provided in this fact sheet.

We want to assure you that while this is new territory, DCFS (and the County of Los Angeles) have emergency operations plans in place for such a time as this. We are operating under our emergency plan, and many of you have reached out with questions and concerns via email. We want to thank you for doing that, and we pledge to stay in open communication with the public with frequent updates as new information becomes available.

We are working quickly to help accommodate and address provider needs and to connect you with additional resources for the children in your care. Although information is evolving quickly, we have a dedicated team in place to monitor developments and provide updates as frequently as possible. We will also share updates as they become available on the [DCFS website](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#) accounts. Please check these channels regularly



for updates. Additional staff have also been assigned to address your questions and will be available to provide you with further guidance.

While we cannot promise that we will have the answers to every question, we will continuously update you regarding frequently asked questions and concerns.

1. Do I need to allow visitation for parents/family or others that have a Court order or are approved for visitation? What about Court Hearings?

Parent/child and sibling visits

The Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles County Dependency Court issued a blanket order effective March 20, 2020 – April 16, 2020 (copy linked [here](#)), which included the following provisions:

- Court ordered in-person visitation between parents, legal guardians, siblings and any other persons shall be temporarily suspended, subject to modification by the Court;
- DCFS shall implement wherever feasible remote visitation by Facebook, Skype, telephone or any similar technology to ensure that children are provided with an opportunity to maintain contact with those persons who were previously ordered to have in-person or remote visitation rights by the court.
- In instances in which those persons or the child lacks necessary equipment to satisfy this order, DCFS shall make efforts to ensure such contact occurs.
- DCFS has discretion to allow children with an existing court order of either unmonitored overnight visitation or an existing court order granting DCFS discretion to permit unmonitored overnight visitation, to remain on an extended visit with their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) during the time period referenced in this order.

In addition to the orders, it is recommended by CDSS that the County assess each situation individually. With respect to children under the age of two-years-old, CDSS advises that efforts should be made to maintain face-to-face visits, which allow children to continue to develop critical early bonds with their parent, unless there are individual health-related risks that prevent this from happening. All youth may struggle with changes to their visitation routines, and a lack of in-person visits may be especially difficult for children who are very young.

When in-person visits do not occur, the foster parent should provide video conferencing, such as FaceTime or Skype, and/or increased phone calls with family members and other social contacts should occur to provide the child and family members with some comfort. This type of contact may assist children, their siblings and parent(s) by occurring more often than it would have in a face-to-face visit.

A tool to assist with helping parents and caregivers to use technology to stay connected to their children may be viewed by clicking [here](#).

<https://haralambie.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/When-You-Cant-Be-There-in-Person.pdf>



Family connections that are essential to the wellbeing of the child should be maintained consistent with screening protocols and social distancing recommendations, including outside visits. If the youth has had several overnight visits and is due to return home soon, the child's/youth's Children's Social Worker or Deputy Probation Officer may evaluate whether an extended home visit during this time period may be appropriate if existing Court orders permit such a visit.

Please be creative with alternative planning during this difficult time. If you have any questions about the appropriateness of an alternative plan for visitation, please consult the assigned Children's Social Worker.

Technology resources for youth

iFoster is currently offering technology access to foster youth ages 13-24, which includes: free, unlimited high-speed data hotspots, headsets, and laptops to assist in taking online classes. For additional information on their available resources, call or email iFoster at: 1-855-936-7837 or phone@ifoster.org.

Child and Family Team Meetings

We recognize that families, youth and providers may need extra support as they navigate this unprecedented crisis and disruption. The Child and Family Team (CFT) process serves as an essential strategy to ensure families and providers can continue caring for children and that the County is aware of the practical and emotional needs of caregivers and children during this time. The CFT also will serve as a critical point of communication, support, and response for circumstances when a child, caregiver, or staff become exposed to COVID-19. Further, locating alternative placements for children will be extremely challenging, and the Child and Family Team is an essential strategy to preserve the ability of families and providers to care for our children.

When it is not possible or advisable to conduct CFT meetings in person, CFT meetings may be conducted using alternative options, including using videoconference or teleconference technology (with several free options, such as Skype, Zoom, or <http://www.freeconferencecall.com> available).

CFT meetings focused on the immediate and contingency planning needs of children in home-based placements and in congregate care placements at risk of placement disruption or who may be particularly significantly impacted by disruptions related to COVID-19 will be prioritized. It is recommended that, in less urgent circumstances, communication should occur with the child's team to ensure the family understands how to request assistance or a team meeting if challenges arise.

Dependency Court Hearings in Los Angeles County

Non-minor dependents, youth, and caregivers of children:

Please contact the assigned attorney regarding your court appearance. If you do not have an assigned attorney, please call (323) 980-1700.



2. Will County Social Workers still come out to visit children placed in our care?

Per guidance provided by CDSS in ACL No. 20-25, Emergency Response (ER) investigations are essential functions and should be prioritized to protect the safety and well-being of children and families, and as County child welfare ER workers are first responders when assessing for the safety and well-being of children who are reported as being abused or neglected, investigations of the abuse or neglect must continue to occur.

Investigators will ask a series of pre-screening questions (see below) during the initial phase of their investigations. If the answers to any of the pre-screening questions is “yes,” the investigator will encourage the caregiver to contact their doctor. The investigator will then follow public health guidelines during their interactions with the caregiver, child(ren) and/or other members of the household, including the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as recommended by public health guidance (and/or encouragement of any recommended use by other individuals in the home). Social workers investigating child abuse referrals must continue to make face-to-face contact with children, however. Investigators will utilize PPE as necessary and maintain at least six feet of distance from parties they are interviewing in person.

Continuing Services Children’s Social Workers are still mandated to have regular contact with their clients to ensure the well-being of children. The requirements of face-to-face visits will be modified to allow for flexibility so that our CSWs can use virtual methods to communicate. Please understand however that there will continue to be times when our staff need to make face-to-face contact with our children to ensure their safety. We ask that you work alongside us and together we will make the best decisions on a case-by-case basis to address in person visits to children and your facilities.

Children’s Social Worker monthly visitation with children/youth

All children in foster care placements must receive monthly social worker visits. Generally, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has considered only face to-face visitation to count towards this requirement. However, an All County Letter was issued on March 21, 2020 (ACL 20-25, copy linked [here](#)) providing new guidelines permitting monthly social worker visits to be accomplished through videoconferencing when an emergency prohibits or strongly discourages face-to-face contact for a public health reason or other similar public or individual health challenges.

In order to minimize the transmission of COVID-19, and given the State “stay at home” order, some face-to-face visits may not be possible and/or prudent at this time. CDSS has advised the County that whether a monthly visit should occur in person is a child-specific decision that must be made based on the training and experience of the social worker and considering all available information. If someone in your home is feeling ill or showing flu-like symptoms ahead of a visit, please contact your Children’s Social Worker to determine if it is safe for the visit to be done in-person or if it should instead be done by Skype, FaceTime or telephone.

DCFS will begin by assessing the individual needs of families and children. This assessment will start with a call to every family to ensure they have what they need to meet the needs of the children in their care.



Factors that will be considered by the case carrying social worker when determining if a face-to-face visit is necessary during this public health state of emergency include the following:

- Is the child being visited by other professionals, tribal representatives and/or mandated reporters during this time period and the social worker can receive an updated report from those professionals and/or reporters regarding the child?
- Has the child been in the same placement for the last 4 months and the social worker has determined that the placement is stable, without any concerns noted?
- Has the child been seen in person by a Foster Family Agency (FFA) social worker within the last 14 days with no concerns reported?
- Is the child in an STRTP or group home (in-state or out-of-state) and receiving ongoing treatment with a mental health professional, as well as on-site case management by the agency staff?
- Has the child been visited by their case manager in each of the prior three months with no concerns noted regarding the placement?
- The chronological and developmental age of the child, as young children and children with developmental delays or disabilities may not be able to verbalize or otherwise communicate needs and safety issues remotely.

When it is determined that a face-to-face visit is not necessary to ensure the child's safety and well-being for that specific monthly visit, alternative methods of contact to monitor the child's safety and well-being can be used. Video conferencing is recommended as the first option for communication with the child and caregiver. If it is determined that a face-to-face monthly visit is not the appropriate contact, the case carrying social worker will assess if weekly or biweekly video contact is a better alternative. If video conferencing is not available, phone calls are an acceptable alternative.

If a face-to-face visit is determined to be needed to ensure the health, safety and well-being of the child, the case carrying social worker (or investigator) should conduct a pre-screening telephone call with the caregiver, as described below.

Prior to a scheduled visitation, please utilize the following screening questions over the phone to ensure that it is safe for visits to occur. Among the questions to ask are:

1. Do you currently have any of the following symptoms?
 - Fever/chills/body aches --and-- _____
 - Cough --or-- _____



Shortness of breath _____

2. Have you traveled to any county or region with significant community transmission (including communities in the United States)?
3. Have you, your children and/or anyone in your household had close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19 with a laboratory confirmed testing in the last 14 days?

If someone answers “yes” to any of the questions, they should be encouraged to contact their doctor and let them know about their symptoms and/or exposure, and the case carrying social worker (or investigator) should make alternate plans to accomplish the purpose of the contact and ensure the child’s health, safety and wellbeing.

If, however, contacting the person by telephone in advance of a face-to-face visit is not appropriate or feasible, the same pre-screening questions should be used prior to beginning the visit and the procedures noted above should be followed.

Additionally, caregivers should notify their designated county representative if clients, partners, family members, etc. self-disclose they have been exposed, are in quarantine or are being tested.

In those situations, where in-person visits cannot safely be held, after notifying the Children’s Social Worker, please arrange communication between the parents, relatives and children by alternative methods, such as Skype, FaceTime or telephone.

Children’s Social Worker monthly visitation with Non-Minor Dependents (NMDs)

As with all youth in foster care, monthly visits for NMDs are still required. However, consistent with the policies for children and youth, the methods in which a social worker may conduct their monthly visits have been expanded. In addition to face-to-face visits, monthly visitation may be conducted through video conferencing, telephone contact, or through courtesy supervision by a tribal representative or another Title IV-E agency, as necessary.

The decision regarding whether a monthly visit with an NMD should occur in person is a case-specific decision that must be made based on the training and experience of the social worker, considering all available information, including the factors described in the section above regarding social worker’s visitation (as they apply to NMDs). For youth in a supervised independent living setting, the pre-screening questions asked of a caregiver, above, are to be asked directly of the NMD.

If the youth does not have a telephone or computer, it is imperative for case carrying social workers to make arrangements to ensure the youth’s needs are met and there is a way to contact the youth. Regardless of what method is utilized for monthly visits, social workers shall ensure that NMDs have proper resources and a plan



developed for following local public health guidance, including, but not limited to: housing, food, water, hygiene, and other needed items. This applies to both NMDs here in California and to those living out of state. In addition, social workers should review public health guidance regarding the prevention of infection.

3. Does a Special Incident Report need to be submitted since schools are closed and children will be missing school for 2 weeks or more?

School closures should be cross reported to the following assigned DCFS Contracts Administration Division Compliance Managers: Diana Flagg (flaggd@dcsf.lacounty.gov) and Victor Akinmurele (akinmv@dcsf.lacounty.gov) between Tuesday, March 24, 2020 through Friday, April 3, 2020.

The following Interim SIR Reporting Guidelines is as follows:

Providers [Foster Family Agencies (FFAs), Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC) – FFA, Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP), Community Treatment Facility (CTF)] should submit only one Special Incident Report with the educational plans for all children, youth and Non-Minor Dependents in the entire facility.

The Special Incident Reports should include the availability of on-line classes, TV instruction, if packets of work were sent to the student, or are being picked up from the school.

OPTIONAL INSTRUCTIONS SHOULD THERE BE A NEED, AS SOME FFAs HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERNS ON HOW TO PROCEED:

Each FFA Social Worker can submit one SIR for all of the children (15 caseload max) on their caseload with each child's school closure plan and work assignment process (TV, Online or Packet sent home), and all County FFA homes are required to have a computer and Internet access.

Each ISFC- FFA Social Worker should submit one SIR for all of the children (8 caseload max) on their caseload with each child's school closure plan and work assignment process (TV, Online or Packet sent home,) and all County ISFC- FFA homes are required to have a computer and Internet access.

4. What should I do if a member of the resource family, placed children, or Foster Family Agency/Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program or Group Home staff is diagnosed with COVID-19 infection or is suspected to have COVID-19?

If it is believed that a child is suspected of having COVID-19, utilize sound professional judgement and prudent parenting standards by taking the following steps:

- Keep the child away from others and contact their primary care doctor.
- If you do not have contact information for the child's primary care doctor, contact the child's social worker.
- Continue to make sensible and reasonable parenting decisions for the child in your care including identifying alternate childcare options with school closures.



- For serious symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, inability to keep fluids down, dehydration, confusion and other serious symptoms, please contact the child’s medical provider.
- People with potentially life-threatening symptoms should call or have someone call 9-1-1.

For more information on prudent parenting standards, please see the California Department of Social Services web site, copy linked [here](#).

If you, a child in your care, or someone else in your household/facility has COVID-19, there is no specific treatment but you can utilize the following steps to help the person with COVID-19 feel better:

- Rest
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Take acetaminophen to reduce fever and pain (note – children younger than two should not be given over-the-counter medications without first speaking to a doctor).

Please note that the above do not stop the infected person from spreading germs and precautions must be taken to avoid infecting others. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health provides guidelines for the care of someone with COVID-19 and what steps should be taken to minimize the spread of the virus for those who are infected, please see the copy of the link [here](#).

It is crucial to follow Special Incident Reporting guidelines. Report all incidents pertaining to COVID-19 that impact children in Out-of-Home care and ensure your assigned Out-of-Home Care Quality Assurance Section Technical Assistance Specialists are kept abreast of all related occurrences.

Please refer to the Contract Exhibit A-5 and the chart below for more information:

| How | To Whom | When |
|-----------|---|-----------------|
| Telephone | Local Fire Authority for all fires and explosions (Section 80061(b)(1) of CCR) | Immediately |
| | Local Health Officer for all epidemic outbreaks [California Code of Regulations §80061(b)(1)] | Immediately |
| | CSW or DPO | Within 24 hours |
| | OHCMD QAS or PPQA CM OD | Within 24 hours |
| | CCLD | Within 24 hours |
| I-Track | CSW or DPO | Within 24 hours |



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|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| (Email only if I-Track is down) | OHCMD QAS or PPQA CM | Within 24 hours |
| | CCLD | Within 24 hours |

For more information, please also follow the Department of Public Health’s guidelines on what to do if you are exposed. For your convenience, a copy is linked [here](#).

5. Are we able to take children and youth on outings?

Per the Department of Public Health and Governor Gavin Newsom’s executive order of March 19, 2020, significant protective measures are ordered to stem or slow the spread of COVID-19 within the County of Los Angeles. These orders include that all individuals residing in California are to remain at home or their residence except as needed to maintain critical infrastructure and services. As such, everyone is required to stay home except to get food, care for a relative or friend, get necessary health care, or go to an essential job. Therefore, outings are not permitted.

6. Where can I get updated information from LA County about COVID-19?

The Department of Children and Family Services has established the following website with information about COVID-19. Los Angeles County and the state of California, and the California Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing Division have their own information pages on COVID-19 as well. Please see the links below for additional guidance and support:

- Department of Children and Family Services
<https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/COVID-19-covid-19-updates/>
- Los Angeles County
<https://covid19.lacounty.gov/>
- State of California
<https://covid19.ca.gov/>
- California Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing Division
<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/community-care-licensing>

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has issued guidance regarding the most effective methods of preventing the spread of COVID-19, including basic precautions like washing hands for 20 seconds and refraining from touching your face. CDPH has also released guidance indicating that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should only be used by healthy individuals in specific circumstances (i.e., when staff are in prolonged close contact



with someone with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection). The CDPH guidelines are available by clicking the link [here](#).

7. Who can I contact regarding questions related to supply disruption of food/medication/other basic necessities or challenges in obtaining these items and other urgent issues?

The Department of Children and Family Services is working quickly to help accommodate and address provider needs or connect you with additional resources for the children in your care during this time. The following interim points of contact have been established to report urgent issues and needs for food and/or emergency supplies:

- Luz Moran, Department of Children and Family Services
Contact at (562) 965-1610 or moranl@dcfs.lacounty.gov for emergency supplies
- Andrya Markham-Moguel, Department of Children and Family Services
Contact at (213) 840-0270 or OHCMDQAS1@dcfs.lacounty.gov for all other urgent DCFS issues

8. Can agencies transition to remote work?

The Community Care Licensing Division has confirmed that until further notice, Foster Family Agencies may use their professional judgment to permit Foster Family Agency social workers to telecommute and to use technology to conduct in-home visits instead of going in person, which can include, but not be limited to, phone calls, video-chatting, FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, etc.

For Community-Based Support Division providers, such as Family Preservation, Prevention and Aftercare, Partnerships for Families, Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment, and Adoption Promotion Support Services, provider staff may use technology to conduct virtual visits and to comply with other contract requirements such as in-person groups and counseling. Whenever possible, there should be a provider staff on site for emergencies or walk-in clients; however, if this is not possible, contact numbers should be posted at the site's doors. These contact phone numbers shall be staffed during business hours.

9. Can Mental Health Service Providers continue to provide services to youth?

The Department of Mental Health (DMH) issued a letter on March 19, 2020, providing guidance on the provision of mental health services to children and youth. A link will be provided here once posted on the DMH website.

10. Will the Providers be expected to adhere to all contract requirements during this time?

On March 18, 2020, the Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) held a teleconference with Children's Residential Providers to provide state guidance to help address licensing related concerns. This included a Statewide blanket waiver for certain regulations. Per CCLD, the details of this blanket waiver, as well as a number of other blanket waivers, will be provided in a Provider Information Notice (PIN). CCLD is expected to release this



PIN on or after March 20, 2020. As soon as the PIN has been released this section will be updated to include a link to the document.

Additionally, your local licensing office has been directed to primarily focus on all issues related to COVID-19, as normal activities in these offices have been paused. CCLD will help providers to acquire the resources they need to continue to provide quality care.

Want More Information?

Here are a few resources to help keep you informed during this time:

- *United States Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC)*
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- *World Health Organization (WHO, International)*
<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus/coronavirus>
- *California Department of Public Health*
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/ncov2019.aspx>
- *California Department of Education*
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/coronavirus.asp>
- *California Department of Social Services*
<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/>
- *Los Angeles County Department of Public Health*
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/>
- *Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health “Coping with Stress” Flyers (available in 13 languages)*
<https://dmh.lacounty.gov/covid-19-information/>
- *Los Angeles County Office of Education*
<https://www.lacoe.edu/Home/Health-and-Safety/Coronavirus-Resources>
- *Los Angeles Unified School District*
<https://achieve.lausd.net/latestnews>
Hotline for families: (213) 443-1300
- *Long Beach Unified School District*
<http://www.lbschools.net/District/coronavirus.cfm>