

**Considerations for Agencies within NH's Developmental Disabilities System:  
Community Participation Services (CPS), Employment and Transportation**

**EFFECTIVE DATE JULY 16, 2020**

This guidance has been developed for Area Agency employees, Provider Agency Staff, Families, Guardians, and participants in New Hampshire's Home and Community Based Services waiver programs. COVID-19 has changed the world and the way people engage in their day to day lives. This guide was created to provide a set of considerations and suggestions for participation in CPS/Day Programming and Volunteer or Paid Employment, as well as transportation surrounding these activities.

**Please note that the document below is provided for considerations and the decision to reengage in community supports, programming and employment should be determined on an individual basis by the team, to include the Provider Agency, Service Coordination and Area Agency Staff, Guardian and/or Family, Healthcare Professionals and above all, the desire of the individual receiving services.**

This guidance does NOT apply to individuals who are COVID-19 positive, in such situations participation in programming should not occur unless the individual is deemed non-contagious by a healthcare professional.

As much as possible, agencies should continue to use alternative electronic methods for communication between individuals and visitors, such as Zoom. While community transmission has slowed in New Hampshire, COVID-19 continues to pose a significant risk for many, in particular those with underlying medical needs.

**General COVID-19 Suggested Policies and Procedures**

- For the duration of the state of emergency in New Hampshire, it is strongly recommended that agencies develop policies regarding face mask/covering use for source control while non-live-in staff are serving individuals, or in any public access area. (See NH DPHS Universal Mask Recommendation). For individuals who cannot tolerate wearing a mask, teams should develop solutions and plans for the individual, as well as staff members, to remain safe.
- Programs should continue active screening for all. All staff members and individuals receiving services (or their families/providers) should be screened for COVID-19 each time they enter the building or begin services, indoors or outdoors, by asking about any of the following symptoms:
  - Fever (feeling feverish or a document temperature of 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit or higher);
  - Respiratory symptoms such as runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throat, cough, or shortness of breath;
  - Whole body symptoms such as muscle aches, chills, and severe fatigue;
  - New gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea;
  - Changes in sense of taste or smell
  - Staff and Individuals and/or their families/providers should also be asked the following questions to identify potential COVID-19 exposure:
    - Have you been in close contact with someone who is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 in the past 14 days?

- Have you traveled in the past 14 days either:
    - Internationally (outside the U.S.);
    - By cruise ship; or
    - Domestically (within the U.S.) outside of NH, VT, or ME on public transportation (e.g., bus, train, plane, etc.)?
  - If individuals (or family member/provider) or staff answer in the affirmative to any of the questions, it is not recommended for the person to engage in providing or receiving any services in a group setting at that time.
- Not everyone will come back to services at the same time
- Participants and families may be rethinking what they want
- Being knowledgeable about risk and tracking changing guidance is critical
- Providers may need to adapt the checklist to meet the individualized needs and circumstances of their programs and settings
- Providers are responsible for implementing standards and safeguards to help protect participants' health and safety
- It is recommended that social distancing guidelines be followed to the best of an individual's ability, with at least 6 feet between people for health and safety. If not possible (for instance, during personal care or while pushing a wheelchair) ensure that each individual is utilizing PPE to the extent they are able.

**Every decision is individualized and based on discussion between individuals and their guardians, families, support providers and other team members.**

<b>Recommended Global Considerations for Community Participation Services/Day Programs and Employment Support Sites</b>
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- Programs may want to consider setting their maximum number of people in a building (both staff and individuals) at a certain percentage of what the building's "typical" capacity is. Programs are encouraged to consider the floor plan, availability of smaller, separate spaces such as conference rooms, classrooms and unoccupied offices, bathroom availability and layout.
- It is recommended that visitors not be allowed into day programming during the COVID-19 emergency. Guidance should be posted and shared with providers, families, volunteers and individuals.
- Consider impacts to both the individual and support staff in regard to spreading the virus to one another. Does the staff person have another job or frequent places where there is a high risk of contracting COVID-19? Likewise, does the individual live or work in a setting where there is a high risk of contracting the virus, and how does this impact staff? Many staff have loved ones at home that might be medically compromised or be in a vulnerable category, employers are encouraged to consider this when planning for re-engaging individuals.
- Consider providing in-person services in a flexible manner outside of a building/program, such as in the person's home or an alternative setting like a walk in the neighborhood, basketball in the local outdoor courts, hike in the woods, or other location with few people and the ability to practice social distancing.

- When choosing locations to visit in the community, consider the practicality of restroom access, places to have meals, places to take a break, or whether stops will need to be made for refreshments or fuel and the impact of these on the individuals being supported.
- Consider establishing a process for how social distancing requirements can be met during meals or other times when several individuals may be engaging in common activities or areas. Consider providing visual cues for social distancing such as tape on the floor, cones, or taped-off areas.
- Consider communicating the capacity for each room, including activity areas, office spaces, meeting rooms, and public gathering areas such as entry areas, via signage and room reservation tools. Consider starting with smaller groups and staggering days and hours.
- Consider establishing clear communication strategies to inform and educate individuals, families, and caregivers on the established PPE guidelines, health screening requirements, new policies/procedures, and expectations of staff, individuals, families, and visitors upon return to a day service setting.
- It is recommended that agencies establish a cleaning and infection control process using CDC guidance and approved cleaning solutions. CDC Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting your facility can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>.
- It is suggested that agencies establish clear guidelines on the procedures of infection control practices, including visitor policies, cleaning of frequently touched areas, frequent handwashing, wearing masks, and social distancing, as well as staff training on PPE use along with continuous ongoing communication and updates.
- Consider establishing clear guidelines that support hand and respiratory hygiene, including cough etiquette for individuals, visitors, and staff, as well as having handwashing stations available at facility entry and supplies of alcohol hand rub for staff to use before and after individual interactions,
- Teams, to include provider agencies, area agencies, individuals and guardians (if applicable) are urged to work together to determine on an individualized basis whether individuals present other vulnerabilities (e.g. significant personal care or behavioral needs) that may impact their ability to attend day services.
- For individuals who reside in Enhanced Family Care or Staffed Residences, teams should consider the benefits of allowing the individual and staff to engage in programming in their homes, if possible.
- Agencies should consider developing an infectious disease plan that includes actions needed when an individual or staff member presents with symptoms during the course of the day. These actions may include:
  - Plans for the individual or staff member to return home,
  - Protocol for cleaning and disinfecting the areas that the individual was present in including when and to what extent the disinfection practices take place,
  - Protocol for informing individuals, families, or staff of possible exposure.

#### **Employment and Job Searching Considerations, in addition to considerations listed above:**

- Consider the individual's interest in and readiness to return to work,
  - Ask the person their thoughts about returning to work;
  - Ask the person what they are worried about;

- Ask the person what they are looking forward to.
- Consider the impact on the individual's mental health of working versus not working, the risk of losing their job if they do not resume work, and their dependency on the income.
- Consider the impact on the individual's benefits, as well as whether or not they are receiving unemployment.
- Consider availability of and ability to utilize PPE at the job site, in relationship to both the individual being served as well as other employees of the company that the individual might be exposed to.
- Consider the individual's understanding and ability to follow new employer safety requirements related to COVID-19 in their specific business.
- Consider the individual's home environment: What are the rules the household has been operating under related to COVID emergency? Would a return to employment change those rules?
  - Identify individuals working outside the home and practices to keep others safe;
  - Identify non-family members in the home that may be coming and going;
  - Identify plans in the event the person or another household member becomes ill with COVID-19;
  - General health status – would the individual's return to work impact anyone with underlying medical conditions living in the home?
- It is recommended that teams assess the risk present at the employment site.
  - Do other employees comply with safety guidelines? Is there a culture of compliance with PPE and social distancing guidelines at the worksite?
  - Has there been an outbreak of COVID-19 previously?
  - Is there adequate space to social distance?
  - Is there a safe place to eat meals?
  - Is there additional training offered to the individual and their support staff?
  - Other risk factors to consider:
    - Outdoor or indoor location (indoor is higher risk) and ventilation;
    - Length of time in environment;
    - Frequent contact with public or co-workers;
    - High touch activities;
    - Access to restrooms;
    - Whether person's participation in the environment pose risk to others;
    - Access to PPE, if employer does not provide.
- It is recommended that Career Planning, Job Development, Prevocational and Supported Employment services provide flexibility in delivering services. Providers are encouraged to use telehealth, virtual meetings, and remote supports where possible.
- Individuals may be employed as essential workers, and may have not stopped working during the pandemic. It may be worthwhile to revisit how things have been going at Essential Worksites, whether there is additional need for training, and how well the site is maintaining recommendations on PPE use and social distancing.

- Individuals who work independently may need assistance accessing and understanding information on performing preventative measures related to their job or traveling using public transportation.
- If applicable, consider encouraging and/or assisting individuals who work and travel independently to review CDC guidance for use of public transportation, found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/using-transportation.html>.
- If possible, screen residents returning to program sites from their jobs with the same protocols developed for screening staff for symptoms of COVID-19.
- Consider assessing whether the individual needs the same amount of support that they previously received at the worksite. It may not be the same as it was pre-pandemic, consider whether additional supports or remote supports might be a better option.

#### **Transportation Considerations in addition to Global Considerations Listed Above**

- It is highly recommended that when riding in a vehicle together with others, individuals and staff use CDC guidance on using transportation, found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/using-transportation.html>.
- It is recommended that teams discuss the mode of transportation (private or public) that will be used, both during program/support time as well as on their own in the community.
- Consider risk factors for transportation, Including:
  - Number of individuals traveling together in a vehicle;
  - Is travel with household members or paid support worker;
  - Is the vehicle being used for other individuals and cleaning between users;
  - Ability to maintain maximum distance;
  - Ability to open windows;
  - Length of time traveling;
  - Ability of person and others to adhere to safety precautions (physical distance, use of masks, limiting touching of surfaces, etc.)
- It is highly recommended that agencies utilize the CDC Guidelines for Cleaning and Disinfecting Non-Emergency Transport Vehicles, found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/disinfecting-transport-vehicles.html>.
- Consider building in time throughout the day for employees to disinfect vehicles and providing additional supervisory staff if necessary to accomplish this.
- Consider ensuring agency vehicles are stocked with items such as easily-accessible hand sanitizer, sanitizing spray, wipes, and PPE to promote use of these throughout the day.