



Lori A. Shibinette
Commissioner

Joseph E. Ribsam, Jr.
Director

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
DIVISION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

129 PLEASANT STREET, CONCORD, NH 03301-3857
603-271-4451 1-800-852-3345 Ext. 4451
Fax: 603-271-4729 TDD Access: 1-800-735-2964 www.dhhs.nh.gov

3/20/2020

Dear relative caregivers and foster parents,

As a result of the latest developments regarding COVID-19 in the State, we continue to monitor and adjust our practices to meet the needs of the children and families who depend upon us within the social distancing framework outlined by the Centers of Disease Control and the New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness transmitted through droplets¹, and while it is highly contagious, the risk is mitigated by limiting interpersonal contact and following recommendations to frequently wash hands, maintain six feet of distance from others, and clean frequently touched services. The latest information regarding COVID-19 can be found at: <https://www.nh.gov/covid19/> and <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Our collective dedication and responsibility to the children and families of New Hampshire is unwavering. Concurrently, we can responsibly limit exposure and the risk of amplifying the spread of COVID-19. Accordingly, DCYF is updating our guidance to support decisions about when personal contact with children, families, and professional colleagues are necessary and when they can be accomplished via telephonic or video conferencing.

Contact with DCYF Staff

When the primary objective of a visit can be achieved through video or telephone conferencing without compromising safety, staff will be utilizing those options instead of in-person contact. You should expect that in most circumstances during this time DCYF staff will be communicating through video or telephone conferencing.

When there is a need to conduct face-to-face visits with children, staff will be calling ahead and asking several screening questions about your family. You are able to ask staff coming to your home the same screening questions. The answers will inform decisions about contact, and allow everyone to best prepare for and structure the interaction. The screening questions are:

- Does anyone who will be met have a cough, fever, or shortness of breath?
- Has anyone who will be met had cough, fever, or shortness of breath in the past 72 hours?
- Is anyone who will be met quarantined?
- Is anyone who will be met positive for COVID-19?

When in-person contact is needed, staff will follow social distancing protocols, which include decreased frequency and duration of any interpersonal contact. They will be observing 6 feet personal space, standing rather than sitting, and trying to utilize outdoor space. They will not take personal belongings into the visit area and will not share pens and other items. This is for the safety of all involved.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/transmission.html>

Parent-Child Visits

As an agency and community, we all value our relationships, especially parent-child bonds. In keeping with public health and CDC guidelines, we must abide by social distancing practices where possible. At the same time, for many children and parents, increased contact with the people they love can sustain hope and mitigate trauma. You are one of the most important bridges children have to maintain a sense of connection. When face-to-face visits are being discussed and/or planned, we should consider and utilize options such as increased phone calls, text messaging, or video chat such as Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, or other internet based mediums .

I am hearing that in a great number of situations parents, relative caregivers, foster parents, and DCYF staff have been creatively meeting these needs in partnership in consideration of our children's best interest. However, if should there be a concern regarding visitation, please consult with your DCYF case worker and/or their supervisor.

Additionally, the aforementioned screening questions should be considered before any in-person visits, and if the answer to any of those questions is "yes," the in-person visit **shall not occur**.

- Do you, or does anyone involved in the visit have a cough, fever, or shortness of breath?
- Have you, or has anyone involved in the visit had cough, fever, or shortness of breath in the past 72 hours?
- Are you, or is anyone involved in the visit quarantined?
- Are you, or is anyone involved in the visit positive for COVID-19?

How to Talk to Children about COVID-19:

Below are resources to assist in talking to children and youth in care about what is happening. It is important to help children and youth understand that this is serious, while not causing them to be afraid.

[Talking about Diseases in the News² \(Bradley Hospital\)](#)

[How to Talk to Your Kids about Coronavirus³ \(PBS\)](#)

[How to Talk to Kids about Coronavirus⁴ \(NY Times\)](#)

[Talking to Children During Infectious Disease Outbreaks⁵ \(attached, from SAMHSA\)](#)

Thank you for your dedication to our children, youth, and families during this most challenging time.

Sincerely,



Joseph E. Ribsam Jr.
Director
NH Division for Children, Youth, and Families

² <https://www.bradleyhospital.org/talking-about-diseases-news>

³ <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-coronavirus>

⁴ <https://parenting.nytimes.com/childrens-health/coronavirus-kids-talk>

⁵ <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Talking-With-Children-Tips-for-Caregivers-Parents-and-Teachers-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/PEP20-01-01-006>