

## Resource Family COVID-19 FAQs

With the rising number of COVID-19 cases in Alaska and the issuance of the Governor's new emergency orders, is OCS doing anything different around visitation and family contact? Are we going back to all digital visits? Why or why not? What are the current expectations around visits and face to face family contact?

- In-person family contact is preferred. However, with spikes in COVID-19 cases in certain areas, OCS has had to limit in-person family contact. When this occurs, a Program Instruction (PI) is issued to workers in that region or office. The PI's state that:
  - OCS supports virtual family contact when possible and age-appropriate.
  - OCS recommends family contact outdoors with appropriate precautions.
- OCS staff will advise if there are changes to the family contact. Questions regarding the status of in-person family contact should be routed to the caseworker.
- Travel for in-person family contact is managed on a case-by-case basis. Travel may depend on community restrictions related to COVID-19. Contact your caseworker if you have any questions.

When we are asked for placement of a child, will we be given any information about their COVID-19 exposure or status? Can we take a child to get tested for the virus if they show symptoms or might have been exposed in our home or community?

- Yes, the assigned Protective Services Specialist or OCS Nurse Consultant will provide you information regarding a child's COVID-19 exposure or status when seeking placement in the home.
- Yes, COVID-19 testing is considered emergency and routine medical care when children show symptoms or were potentially exposed to COVID-19. Resource Families may take children placed in their home to get tested for COVID-19. Please consult with the assigned Protective Services Specialist or OCS Nurse Consultant before testing occurs.

With OCS offices being closed due to COVID-19 cases and workers in quarantine, what are the expectations about how often caseworker visits will happen? What are the safety precautions around those visits?

- In-person caseworker visits are the preferred method. However, with spikes in COVID-19 cases in certain areas, OCS has had to limit in-person contact. When this occurs, a Program Instruction (PI) is issued to workers in that region or office.
- OCS Protective Services Specialists can complete virtual caseworker visits via Zoom or other virtual platforms when OCS has had to limit in-person contact. In this case, there may be times when an OCS Protective Services Specialist would be required to do face-to-face contact with a child. The staff member would be required to wear approved

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including a Medical-grade surgical mask, a face shield, and disposable gloves. Before starting their work shift, OCS staff must take their temperature and self-monitor for other potential COVID symptoms.

What is the support available for foster families around childcare and respite? If a childcare center is shut down and a foster parent works, are there any resources or information supports a family can draw on?

- The OCS Childcare Hotline can assist with setting up childcare for families. During the pandemic, OCS has allowed for more flexibility regarding the use of unlicensed childcare facilities. Please contact the childcare team at 465-5648 or [ocschildcare@alaska.gov](mailto:ocschildcare@alaska.gov) with questions and assistance with locating alternative daycare as needed.

What kind of safety precautions are being taken in rural areas where rotational workers are coming in and out of the community?

- OCS caseworkers are directed to reach out to communities to find out about existing requirements before traveling. Caseworkers will wear appropriate PPE when traveling and during in-person contact. Traveling caseworkers are tested twice per month and adhere to the community testing and PPE requirements.

What are the expectations around school? Can foster parents make those decisions to return children to classroom teaching when schools open back up? Is this a good time to ask a child to be moved to a different school if it is easier for our family?

- The OCS caseworker, Guardian ad litem, biological parents, and foster parents should be included in decisions regarding a child's education. OCS is still required to follow the Every Student Succeeds Act, which requires children to maintain their 'home' school unless it is not in their best interest. If you feel it is in the best interest of the child in your home to change schools or schooling options (in-person, virtual, homeschool), please consult with the Protective Services Specialist.

Can children and youth receive the COVID vaccines? Are foster parents able to consent to the vaccination?

- At this time, the COVID-19 vaccines have only been approved for emergency use for adults and youth 16 and older. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) states that as the vaccine availability increases, vaccination recommendations will expand to include more groups; see [CDC](#) and [State of Alaska](#) vaccine information.
- Tribes and Tribal Organizations have also been issued an allotment of vaccinations. The Tribes vaccination rollout may be different from the State's vaccine rollout schedule, but children under 16 have not been approved for vaccinations at this time.

- The COVID-19 vaccine is considered an elective immunization. This means that the youth's parent or guardian must consent to the vaccine. Consent will need to come from the child's biological parents or OCS if parental rights have been terminated. OCS would notify the legal parties before consenting to the vaccination.
- Youth 16 and older who are placed in residential settings in Alaska are on the first schedule for vaccines. The child's parent or guardian would need to consent before the vaccine could be administered.

What are the expectations for extracurricular activities, cultural, enrichment, and social activities?

- OCS follows the recommendations from the CDC regarding [travel](#), [sports](#), and [social activities](#). OCS does not support high-risk activities for children in care.
- Resource families are expected to use the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard when making decisions around these activities. Many cultural and social activities have gone virtual or are practicing social distancing and mask-wearing practices. COVID-19 presents special challenges if a child, foster family, or biological family member has a medical condition that requires extra precautions. If you are unsure if an activity is safe, contact the child's caseworker.

Is COVID impacting court hearings or planning for permanency? How are timelines for reunification or permanency being impacted by COVID?

- Courts are adjusting to Zoom hearings. Some courts are working towards a return to in-person hearings. The procedures are based on the specific judicial district.