

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Program Instruction: 20-05

Issue Date: 04/28/2020

Effective Date: 05/01/2020

From: Natalie Norberg, OCS Director

Subject: Temporary OCS Policy Changes in Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak and Public Health Disaster Emergency – Supersedes Program Instruction 20-03

Background: In response to the Governor's plan to Reopen Alaska Responsibly, the Office of Children's Services will cautiously proceed with the resumption of certain services previously halted during the "hunker down" phase of the pandemic response. Resumption of services will occur with utmost care and precaution, taking into consideration the unique circumstances of each situation (including the developmental needs of children and health vulnerabilities of all parties involved) while protecting children, birth parents, foster parents, and the OCS workforce from unnecessary risk of exposure. This Program Instruction will remain in effect until June 1, 2020.

Policy:

A. Screening Visitors to OCS Offices:

All public entry to OCS offices will be by appointment only. All OCS offices must schedule and provide advance telephonic screening to all visitors, using the screening questions listed below in green.

- Upon screening, if a potential visitor answers "Yes" to any of the screening questions, they will be politely instructed not to visit the office and encouraged to contact their doctor about their symptoms. An alternate plan will be determined to accomplish the purpose of the meeting utilizing the phone or consult a supervisor for additional case specific ideas.
- Upon screening, if a potential visitor answers "No" to all the screening questions, a scheduled visit to the office may occur, using the "Preventive Measures" listed in section H below.
- If an office receives an unscheduled visitor, the visitor will be required to stand 6 feet away from the front door while an OCS security officer or other staff member conducts the screening procedure.
- One family unit will be in an office lobby reception area at a time.
- OCS staff will wipe down office lobbies and family contact rooms after each family unit visit.

B. In-Person contacts should continue to be limited to only high priority situations. Exceptions include the facilitation of family contact when the appropriate precautions are taken (see below). High Priority situations include: Initial Assessments, Licensing Investigations, Emergency Licensing, responding to an emergency in a foster home or with a foster child, or emergency child transport purposes. Screening and adherence to preventative measures is required.

C. Screening:

- Whenever possible, initiate a pre-contact phone call to ask the screening questions below in green text.
- If a pre-contact phone call is not possible, when face to face, let the person know you have screened yourself and now you need to screen them in order to keep everyone safe.

In high priority situations where pre-contact screening is not possible, OCS staff must put on all available PPE (face shield, mask and gloves) or PPE Safety Alternates before initiating an

in-person contact.

- If the answer is “No” to the screening questions, proceed with the visit as normal, using the “Preventive Measures” listed in section H below.
- If someone answers “Yes” to the screening questions:
 - They should be encouraged to contact their doctor and let them know about their symptoms. If the individual does not have a regular doctor they should be encouraged to call the local community hotline phone number to discuss options for COVID-19 screening. If the local hotline number is not known, call 2-1-1 for guidance.
 - If immediate transportation to a medical facility is recommended, please request an EMS transport

D. Family Contact – all instructions below are intended to provide guidance for how to safely proceed with increasing and prioritizing in-person family contact opportunities. OCS managers and supervisors may approve reasonable exceptions based on individual case circumstances and available resources.

For children ages 0-3 and their siblings:

In-person Family Contact may be provided if the following conditions are met by either OCS staff, an OCS grantee or contractor or a relative/volunteer approved by OCS:

1. A “Family Contact Pre-Screening Verification Form” must be completed (See attached).
2. Screening:
 - a. All parties must be screened within one hour before the family contact starting. Screening includes:
 - i. Answering “No” to the screening questions listed below;
 - ii. Confirmation that no one participating in or present for the family contact has a body temperature reading of more than 99.2° F within one hour prior to the contact starting.
3. Protective Measures which must be followed:
 - a. All parties must wear a face covering that covers their mouth and nose for the entirety of the family contact.
 - i. Children under the age of 2 years old or anyone who has trouble breathing are exempt from wearing a mask.
 - b. All parties must wash their hands for at least 20 seconds using soap and/or apply hand sanitizer before and after the contact.
 - c. OCS Staff must attempt to maintain 6 foot distance from other people except when the safety of the child requires closer intervention; or if physically carrying a child is required.
 - d. The family contact should occur outdoors whenever possible.
 - e. All hard surfaces, including surfaces inside State vehicles used for transports, must be disinfected before and after each contact by the family contact supervisor.
4. Factors to consider in deciding whether in-person family contact should proceed:
 - a. In-person contact is not advised if there are any individuals in the child’s foster home who are at high risk to develop life threatening complications due to contracting COVID 19, such as individuals who are age 65 or older, or suffering from an underlying health condition.

Go to this link for more information:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/groups-at-higher-risk.html>

- b. The availability of face coverings, thermometers, hand cleaning and surface disinfection supplies to comply with sections 2 and 3 above.

5. Prohibited:
 - a. No air travel for family contact is permitted at this time.

If in-person family contact is not feasible because the conditions above cannot or will not be met, document those circumstances with specificity in ORCA and explore electronic methods for visitation that would include FaceTime, or telephone visits, or other communication applications.

For children ages 4 and older:

Family contact will remain limited to electronic methods.

- For supervised family contact, OCS will reach out to foster families to find out if they are willing to facilitate and supervise electronic contact.
- When family contacts do not require supervision, liberal phone calls between children and their parents is recommended.
- Foster parents should be asked to document the date and time of contacts, any issues or concerns raised during the contacts, and send the caseworker a weekly summary.
- If foster parents are unable or unwilling to help facilitate visits, the OCS worker should staff each case individually with their supervisor and try to identify reasonable alternatives. This may include OCS facilitating an electronic contact by transporting a child or parent to an OCS office and utilizing state equipment.

E. Monthly Case Worker Visits with Children and Parents and Routine Licensing Visits to Foster Homes:

Monthly Caseworker/Licensing visits will continue to be limited to electronic methods such as FaceTime, Zoom or telephone visits, or other communication applications.

- Protective Service Specialists must make arrangements to speak to each foster child privately and alone, preferably through FaceTime, Zoom or some other video conference method, utilizing a simple telephone contact as a last resort.
- Relocation licensing requests will be staffed with a CCLS II or CCLS III to determine if this can be done via videoconferencing.

F. Initial Assessment Triaging

Intake will continue to prioritize and screen-in high priority reports.

G. Documentation

If any essential service isn't completed because of exposure or potential exposure to COVID-19 or a positive screening, document each uncompleted task in an activity note in ORCA. Note the specific reason(s) why the task could not be completed. For example:

- "Someone in the home screened positive to one of the screening questions"; or
- "The foster parent refused access to the home even though everyone screened negative to the screening question."

H. Exposure Reporting

All potential employee exposure to COVID-19 incidents that occur as a result of job duties must be reported immediately via the "OCS Infections Disease Exposure Report." Report any potential exposures to a resource family or a foster child. After the report is complete, please submit via email to:

hss.occsafety@alaska.gov.

I. Preventive Measures to help keep illness from spreading:

- Wear a PPE mask or cloth face covering when indoors and in situations where maintaining six feet social distance is not possible.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover coughs or sneezes with a sleeve or a tissue. Throw tissue in the trash.
- Stay at least 6 feet away from others.

Screening Questions:

➤ **In the past 14 days have you or anyone else in your household felt unwell, or experienced any of the following symptoms:**

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| • Fever | • Muscle Pain |
| • Cough | • Headache |
| • Chills | • Sore throat |
| • Repeated shaking with chills | • New loss of taste of smell |
| • Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing | |