

## Foster Parent Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19

### *What is the OCS systemic response to COVID-19 and how are these actions influencing its practice? How will this response plan be communicated to foster parents?*

During this public health emergency OCS Staff must avoid in-person contacts with clients and others as much as possible. Only high priority situations warrant in-person contact. Examples of high priority situations include:

- Responding to reports of harm that are a priority level 1 or 2 as well as Provider Investigations.
- Emergency removals and activities related to emergency placements (including safety walk-throughs or fingerprinting for emergency licensing.
- Emergencies in foster homes or with a foster child.
- Child transports to critical appointments.

OCS is taking additional steps to limit the spread of the COVID-19 Virus by requiring staff to conduct non high priority business by video conference, skype and telephone as much as possible and to practice social distancing and universal health precautions when in-person contact is required.

OCS staff are primarily telecommuting for work duties when possible. All staff in the office are being reminded to wash their hands frequently and public spaces are being sanitized regularly.

All public entry to OCS offices will be by appointment only. All OCS offices must schedule and provide telephonic pre-screening over the telephone in advance of all appointments in the office.

Any OCS staff who are exhibiting signs of illness or not feeling well will be asked to go home.

Please watch the OCS website for additional updates for foster parents.

### *Will you know if a child has been exposed to COVID-19 before being placed in home? Will OCS disclose illness symptoms to FP before requesting placement?*

If OCS learns that a foster child has been exposed to or has tested positive for COVID-19, the agency will be following State Health Department protocol to insure the child receives proper health care and quarantine. As with every placement, OCS will provide full disclosure to the foster parent of any illness symptoms exhibited by the child prior to requesting placement.

### *What is expected of us if someone in our family gets COVID-19 or a foster child gets COVID-19?*

If a member of a foster family or a foster child in your home contracts COVID19, your medical provider will discuss the proper health care treatment. Additionally, you should report to OCS any concerns of exposure to COVID-19 to a foster child in your care.

### *Does Medicaid cover testing of a child for COVID-19? Can a foster parent get a child tested?*

It is important that resource parents identify the Primary Care Providers (PCP) for foster children placed in their homes. If a child is ill, or you have concerns, call the office of the PCP with any questions, and you will be guided whether to have the child come to the office, go to the ED, or to monitor the child from home.

If a medical professional determines that it is medically necessary to have a foster child tested, Medicaid will cover the cost for the test.

### *Is it safe to travel with kids? What do we need to do?*

All non-essential out of state and in state travel for children in state custody is suspended until further notice. Limiting all travel in order to reduce exposure and spread of the virus is vital. As always, please consult with your OCS caseworker before making travel plans that involve your foster child.

***What about visits and family contact? How will the safety of children and adults be protected? What if birth family are visibly sick? Can I stop a visit?***

OCS is requesting Resource Families facilitate electronic based family contacts for all children placed in their home. Electronic methods for visitation such as Zoom, FaceTime, telephone, or other communication applications will replace in person contact until further notice. . If you don't feel comfortable facilitating face time or phone calls between your foster children and their birth parents and siblings, please let your caseworker and licensing representative know. OCS is requesting foster parents send a weekly family contact update to the primary caseworker that records the date and time the contact occurred as well as any concerns raised.

***Many foster parents are older and many family placements are grandparents. Are there special precautions for the elderly and medically fragile populations?***

Older caregivers or caregivers with chronic diseases, such as heart or lung disease and diabetes should take precautions such as avoiding large crowds, staying away from people who are sick and practicing frequent hand washing. If adhering to such precautions creates a hardship for caring for a foster child, please contact OCS for assistance.

***What assistance can OCS give if child care is an issue with the shutdown of schools?***

OCS will continue to assist foster parents with finding alternative and temporary providers when needed. The Office of Children's Services Childcare team is available at 465-5648 or [ocschildcare@alaska.gov](mailto:ocschildcare@alaska.gov), to answer their questions and to assist locating alternative daycare as needed.

***Can foster parents refuse entry of a caseworker into their home if they believe the social worker is sick or showing symptoms of being sick?***

Caseworkers should be completing their monthly caseworker visits through Facetime, Skype, Zoom, telephone or other electronic method. An OCS caseworker should only be coming to your home if there were to be a report of potential abuse or neglect of a child(ren) in the home. OCS staff must first utilize the below screening question prior to in person contact. They will also be required to utilize any available Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or PPE Safety Alternates before proceeding with in person contact.

**Screening Question**

**I have screened myself, and now I need to ask you:**

- In the past few days have you or anyone else in your household felt unwell, especially with respiratory symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing) or loss of taste or smell or gastrointestinal/digestive issues?**