



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health & Human Services
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To: DDS Individuals and Families
From: Commissioner Jane Ryder
Date: 3/25/2020
Subject: Coronavirus Update for Individuals and Families

Dear DDS Community:

I'd like to provide an update on the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) response to COVID-19 as of Wednesday, March 25.

State of Emergency

The Governor has announced **important updates to the State of Emergency** including:

- **Nonessential businesses must close their physical workspaces and facilities to customers, workers, and the public.** Essential businesses include grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations, and restaurants offering take-out or delivery.
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) has issued a **[Stay-at-Home Advisory](#)** for residents who are not providing essential services.
- **Gatherings are limited to 10 people**, a reduction from the previous 25-person limit.
- **Child care programs are now closed.** **[Exempt Emergency Child Care programs](#)** are being made available to provide emergency, back-up, drop-in child care for emergency workers, including essential human service and health care staff.

Essential Services for your Family Member

Group home and facility-based residential services are essential and the staff who support your family members in those settings are performing essential work. Medical and personal care are also essential services. Providers of mental and behavioral health care, personal care attendants, home health aides, and home care workers are performing essential work. Some of these services may be provided remotely.

Visitation

To protect the health and safety of your loved ones, **all in-person visitation to group homes and residential facilities is now prohibited**, except for certain compassionate care situations, such as an end-of-life situation. We encourage families to stay in contact with their loved ones using technology, including phone and video calls. DDS and provider staff can help facilitate.

Mitigating the Risk of Spreading COVID-19

Staff, vendors, and individuals with any of the conditions below are restricted from entering areas of care:

- Sick with fever (100.3), cough, or sneezing.
- Recent international travel (i.e., within the past 14 days) from a [COVID-19-affected geographic area](#).
- Close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

In accordance with the DPH [Stay-at-Home Advisory](#), we are suspending short visits with family into the community or to the family home. **If you wish to take your family member home with you, they must remain with you for the duration of this public health emergency.**

Remote Services

DDS programs, including Day Programs and Family Support Centers, are encouraged to continue offering services and supports remotely. If you do not have the technology available, DDS can help you access it. Please contact your Area Office to learn more.

Individual Support Plan

We are advising our employees that regular business, such as ISP meetings, may continue to be conducted remotely using conference calls and other group communication technology, if individuals, guardians, and staff can participate. In cases where it is not possible to conduct a scheduled ISP remotely, DDS will be seeking to extend state and federal time requirements related to service planning.

Guidance for Programs

The Executive Office for Health and Human Services (EHS) has provided guidance on programs including protocols for when to quarantine and use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Find all current guidance documents here:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-guidance-and-recommendations>

Please note that the [Residential and Congregate Care Program guidance](#) (updated March 20) applies to all DDS state and provider-operated programs.

The website and guidance above and will continue to be updated, so please review regularly.

Health

If you or anyone in your family has symptoms of illness (fever, cough, or shortness of breath) or potential exposure to COVID-19, please take these steps:

- Contact your primary care physician and follow their guidance.
- Contact the Massachusetts DPH epidemiology line: [\(617\) 983-6800](tel:6179836800).

For the latest information on COVID-19, please call 2-1-1 or visit: mass.gov/covid19

Family Support

DDS-funded [Family Support Centers](#) are here to support you through this crisis and can be a source for emergency support and information about local resources. Please contact your DDS Area Office if you need help connecting with your local Family Support Center.

Disabled Persons Protection Committee (DPPC)

To report suspicion of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse or neglect of a person with a disability, contact the DPPC 24-hour hotline:

- 1-800-426-9009
- 1-888-822-0350 TTY

Communication

Your Area Office will remain the primary DDS point-of-contact for you regarding ongoing services and supports. Provider agencies have been directed to contact you immediately should they close or alter service schedules. Area Offices will remain in contact with you to help mitigate any disruptions and ensure needed supports are addressed.

We will continue to update the [DDS COVID-19 Resources and Support website](#) and social media as information becomes available. Please contact your Area Office with any immediate questions or for assistance.

Thank you,

Jane F. Ryder
Commissioner
[Department of Developmental Services](#)