



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

**TO:** County Children and Youth Agencies  
Private Children and Youth Social Services Agencies  
Child Welfare Service Providers

**FROM:** Jonathan Rubin  
Deputy Secretary for Children, Youth and Families

**RE:** Guidance from the Department of Human Services,  
Office of Children Youth and Families regarding  
Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

**DATE:** March 11, 2020

In response to growing concerns about the spread of COVID-19 and its potential impact on the delivery of services to individuals and families the Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth, and Families (OCYF) has developed the following operational recommendations for counties and providers of child welfare services. Information will continue to be shared and disseminated going forward to address questions and concerns that have been brought to our attention.

Information will continue to be shared and disseminated going forward to address questions and concerns that have been brought to our attention. We continue to monitor information from [the Pennsylvania Department of Health](#) and [the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Guidance developed by DHS will be centrally located on [this page](#), which will be updated as additional guidance becomes available. We encourage you to continue to consult these resources for updates on COVID-19, information on staying healthy, and updates on the situation in Pennsylvania.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Recommendation #1: Exercise and promote hygienic practices.**

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to COVID-19. Providers should remind staff that chances of exposure can be reduced by:

- Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after being in a public place, or after blowing noses, coughing, or sneezing.
- Using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water is not readily available. People should cover all surfaces of hands and rub them

together until they feel dry.

- Avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Covering mouths and noses with a tissue when coughing or sneezing or using the inside of their elbow.
- Cleaning AND disinfecting frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.
- If sick, stay home.

**Recommendation #2: Review your agency back-up plan and infection control procedures.**

All counties and providers are strongly encouraged to:

- Review internal infection control protocols and emergency backup plans for events in which a provider does not have adequate staffing to meet individuals' health and safety needs.
- Evaluate staff adherence to provider infection control protocols.
- Evaluate capacity to implement emergency backup plans in the event staffing is impacted by the COVID-19 virus.

For questions or technical assistance related to emergency plans, counties and providers may contact the appropriate regional office.

**OCYF Regional Office Contact Information**

<b>Central Regional Office</b> Phone: 717-772-7702	<b>Northeast Regional Office</b> Phone: 570-963-4376
<b>Southeast Regional Office</b> Phone: 215-560-2249	<b>Western Regional Office</b> Phone: 412-565-5728

**Recommendation #3: Report all suspected cases of COVID-19 to OCYF**

For OCYF to be responsive to the needs related to COVID-19, timely information from the county and provider community is essential. Staff should follow Department of Health (DOH) guidance for evaluation, testing, and reporting related to staff or a beneficiary suspected of having COVID-19 available [here](#). If staff or a person for whom

you provide services is suspected to have COVID-19 or tests presumptively positive for COVID-19, please notify the appropriate regional office.

**Recommendation #4: Contact OCYF before making any changes to your business practice whenever possible.**

It is strongly recommended that county child welfare agencies and providers contact OCYF before making any changes to their business practices in response to COVID-19. Examples of changes in business practices include, but are not limited to:

- Suspending services at a service location or temporarily closing programs.
- Reducing or eliminating the provision of placement for children or youth in a program.
- Closing county offices.

OCYF is monitoring the COVID-19 situation closely and is prepared to modify expectations for compliance on a case-by-case basis should emergency conditions present. By contacting OCYF, providers may be able to implement the most effective strategy for maintaining continuity of operations during COVID-19.

Providers may contact the appropriate regional office to notify OCYF of a proposed change in business practice and/or seek guidance related to a proposed change.

**Recommendation #5: Document what actions were taken and maintain evidence for why actions were taken.**

Counties and providers should document any changes to their operations and expenses incurred related to operations as a result of COVID-19 and maintain evidence to support why the changes were made. Doing so will help demonstrate the basis for an action in the event that the appropriateness of the action is questioned after COVID-19 is contained and operations return to normal. It will also support any changes that may need to be made and substantiate submitted claims for services rendered in an alternative manner due to COVID-19.

OCYF will provide technical assistance with the kind of evidence that should be maintained when counties or providers contact OCYF in accordance with Recommendation #4. In general, evidence that should be maintained includes, but is not limited to:

- **Orders or notices from local authorities.** Example: County Health Department *A* imposes a restriction on public gatherings of more than 20 people, forcing Provider *B* to close its vocational program for one week. Provider *B* should retain the official notice from County Health Department *A* as evidence to support the closure.



- **Correspondence and other records demonstrating inability to meet required staffing ratios or response times.** Example: Provider A's employees are unable to report to work due to COVID-19-related reasons. Provider A attempts to secure temporary staff from three staffing agencies, but each agency reports that they too are experiencing staff shortages. As a result, Provider A is out of compliance with required staffing ratios. Provider A should retain copies of correspondence with each of the three staffing agencies to demonstrate that all possible efforts were made to secure enough staff.

### **Recommendation #6: Stay Informed**

- COVID-19-specific information can be found at:
  - The Pennsylvania Department of Health's Coronavirus Update Page - <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>
  - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Coronavirus Page - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>
- The Pennsylvania Department of Health holds press briefings every day to announce the latest efforts and updates on the commonwealth's response to COVID-19. Counties and providers may watch a free live stream of the daily briefing at noon here: <https://pacast.com/live/doh>. An archive of past briefings is available here: <https://pacast.com/video>.
- One of the most important steps you can take to stay informed about our program is subscribe to our Listservs. Important announcements, including announcements about COVID-19, are regularly sent over the Listservs.
  - Please email [ra-DPWOCYFNet@pa.gov](mailto:ra-DPWOCYFNet@pa.gov) requesting addition to the OCYF Listserv, if you are not already subscribed.

### **Resources for Infection Control Practices**

- COVID-19 Information for at-risk Individuals: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Diseases%20and%20Conditions/Coronavirus%20At%20Risk%20Individuals.pdf>
- Strategies to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 in Long-Term Care Facilities (LTCF) (Source: CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/prevent-spread-in-long-term-care-facilities.html>
- CMS Guidance for Home Health Agencies: <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-20-18-hha.pdf>



- CMS Guidance on Respirators for Healthcare Personnel:  
<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-20-17-all.pdf>

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