



Department for Children and Families
Family Services Division
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Agency of Human Services

March 19, 2020

Greetings-

As a parent involved with the Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division we understand that this is a difficult time making decisions about contact with others outside of your home because of the COVID – 19 virus.

We want to let you know that we are taking multiple steps to try to lessen the spread of this virus. These steps are in effect for as long as the Governor's Emergency Declaration is in effect. Currently, offices are minimally staffed so the best way to reach your Family Services Worker is by email or cell phone. Also, until further notice all team meetings will be held by phone.

As you know, DCF has a responsibility to ensure that contact between parents and children occur in a manner that is safe and appropriate, in alignment with the latest guidance from the Department of Health, and in compliance with the expectations of the court. Vermont is currently in a state of emergency and current recommendations from the CDC strongly encourage social distancing. In response to that, daycares, schools and many public establishments have shut down to slow the spread of the virus.

We have issued guidance to our staff that directs them to call parents and ask if they agree to contact with their children by virtual/remote means. This can be done by telephone call, FaceTime, Skype, ZOOM, etc. Our hope is that we can partner with you to keep everyone safe and connected.

We are also following the screening process that the Vermont Department of Health recommends in case there has to be in person contact. These questions are:

1. Have you been in close contact with a person who has COVID-19?
2. Have you felt unwell with respiratory symptoms in the last few days? *Cough, high temperature, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing?*

If the answer to either of these questions is "yes" we encourage you to **PHONE** your health care provider.

The Vermont Department of Health has created a website that is updated at 2pm on a daily basis. This is the best place to go for up to date information regarding COVID -19 specific questions:

<https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/infectious-disease/2019-novel-coronavirus>



The Family Services Division's Central Intake and Emergency Service Program (CIES) will continued to be staffed 24/7 and can be reached at 1(800)649-5285.

If you are a parent with a child or youth in DCF custody we understand that this is a difficult time to have your child outside of your care and home. We are providing support and guidance to those caring for children and youth to try and minimize the spread of the virus. We have implemented the following safeguards recommended by the Vermont Department of Health:

- Family Services Workers will not be visiting children and youth in foster or kin care or in residential programs for the duration of the Governor's Emergency Declaration, which as of today is 4/15/20. They will be in contact with children, youth and their caregivers by phone, Face Time and other electronic means.
- Team meetings and case plan reviews will likely be held via phone for the duration of the Emergency Declaration.
- Children in the care of the Department will not be travelling outside of the State of Vermont if the travel is not essential.
- We are following the Vermont Department of Health's guidance for screening by telephone (see questions on first page) prior to any face to face contact with families.
- If someone answers yes to any screening question, we will be doing our work with them by phone, Face Time or other electronic means.
- We are exploring ways to safely maintain family time between parents and their children. You will be receiving a call soon if you haven't already, to plan for your family time with your child(ren).
- We will be encouraging limited movement of children from place to place within Vermont during this period in an effort to follow Vermont Department of Health guidelines.

The court has suspended all non-emergency court hearings through April 15th. This date could change if the Governor decides to extend the State of Emergency. When hearings do need to happen, you can participate by phone by calling the court at the time of the hearing.

We are putting up a public website and further updates regarding our work will be posted there. Please check this site for up to date information:

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/COVID19>

Thank you for your understanding during these difficult times.

Sincerely,



Christine Johnson
Deputy Commissioner
Department for Children & Families
Family Services Division