Eric J. Holcomb, Governor
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Memo dated: May 1, 2020

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) continues to develop and share guidance related to the coronavirus, knowing that information rapidly changes. It is the agency's vision to ensure Indiana children live in safe, healthy and supportive families and communities. It is still imperative we provide services, even if the way we provide them will be different potentially for some time. You have remained steadfast in your approach and care of children and families who look to us to remind them that they are not isolated and without support during this time of uncertainty. While it is imperative that caseworkers continue to ensure the well-being of children in care, it remains vital that all decisions are balanced against the health of caseworkers, our service provider partners, natural parents, resource parents, community partners, and of course, the children.

On March 20, 2020, I issued the first formal guidance on how we must adjust our how we provide care to the public. At that time, the adjustments in case management, parenting time, and visitation were given a deadline of May 1, 2020. Please note that while the adjustments will remain in place through May 24, we all must thoughtfully consider how we will transition to our new normal now that we have received further direction from Governor Eric Holcomb.

The guidelines implemented on March 20, 2020 will remain in place with following updates.

Screening Questions

1. Is there any reason you have been instructed to self-quarantine or isolate? If yes, why?
2. Have you had contact with any person with symptoms of COVID-19 OR a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis within the last 14 days?
3. Do you have any symptoms of a respiratory infection (e.g., cough or shortness of breath)?
4. Do you have at least 2 of the following symptoms:
    - Fever
    - Chills
    - Repeated shaking with chills
    - Muscle pain
    - Headache
    - Sore throat
    - New loss of taste or smell

**Note that the symptom list has expanded. Click on the embedded link to see the additional symptoms added by the CDC.

Child Abuse Hotline.

Hotline staff will pre-screen calls to assess if anyone is sick or has been exposed to COVID-19, utilizing the screening questions in addition to the routine intake questions.

Protocol for Initial Abuse/Neglect Investigations and Monthly Face-to-Face Contacts
Continue with March 20th guidance.

It is crucial that staff members are diligent in their documentation during this time. Take detailed notes, documenting the reason the visit was conducted virtually and information from the visit that is pertinent to the child's well-being. Do not record the virtual visits, but take screenshots if relevant.

Note: Practicing good hand hygiene and following the CDC prevention practices is important when interacting face to face.

Visitation Protocol
Effective through May 24, 2020, parenting time and sibling visits may be conducted virtually unless required by the court to be in person. Efforts must be made to maintain parent/child contact requirements by using an allowable alternative, such as phone, Skype, Facetime or other available technology. Caseworkers should not prohibit approved parenting time or sibling visits. However, the frequency, duration and type of contact may be tailored to the case circumstances, government and local public health directives, and in consultation with/agreement among parents and caregivers. Staff should work with their local office and involved individuals to make every effort to utilize technology that allows for as much engagement as possible if in-person visits cannot occur. If virtual visits have to be used in lieu of face-to-face contacts, child and family teams should consider increasing the frequency and/or duration of visits to help families have more contact during this time.

If staff, caregivers and parents agree it is necessary to have in-person parenting time and/or sibling visits, this contact may still occur provided everyone in the foster parent and birth parents home is pre-screened and answers "no" to the screening questions.

If an in-person visit can occur, conducting the visit outdoors should be explored as an alternative to an indoor visit, weather permitting. Practicing good hand hygiene and following the CDC prevention practices is important when interacting face to face.

Staff attorneys should notify the court of any changes made to court-ordered parenting time because of public health and safety issues. For parenting time guidelines released by the Juvenile Justice Improvement Committee (JJIC), click here.

Visitation at Residential Facilities
In-person visits at residential facilities are suspended through May 24, 2020. DCS will continue to monitor guidance from ISDH and CDC during this time. Youth are expected to virtually meet with probation officers and their family case managers in a private setting that ensures confidentiality. **If you have questions or concerns related to facility plans or precautions, please direct these to the Residential Licensing Team: residential.licensing@dcs.IN.gov**

Child and Family Team Meetings
Whenever possible, continue to hold Child and Family Team Meetings virtually. If the child and family team feels an in-person meeting is essential, aim for groups of fewer than 10 people, spaced at least 6 feet apart – using social distancing. Attendees must answer no all of the screening questions in order for an in-person visit to proceed.

Court

Chief counsels and local office directors continue to have open communication with their designated courts regarding schedules. In many counties, the courts are closed except for emergency cases. Local attorneys will be in contact with your judge or magistrate regarding your county cases.

For updated court closures, click here.

Resource Parents

Foster care specialists will conduct weekly check-ins with foster families, kinship families and licensed child placing agencies (LCPA) to evaluate how DCS can best support these families during this time.

Medical Appointments for Children in Foster Care

The COVID-19 outbreak has prompted changes to maintain required and recommended medical appointments for children in DCS care. Please keep the following in mind:

- If a foster child is a newborn or young infant, or the child has medical issues, the child should be seen as recommended by the medical provider who is caring for the infant.
    - Some healthcare providers are providing virtual well-child and in-person well-child visits. Please document it if the provider was unable to conduct a well-child visit due to the current situation.

Youth in College

DCS has identified all of our youth in dorms and has back-up housing plans in place. Contact is being maintained with those youth and their 3CMs if case plans fall through. 3CMs are asked to maintain routine weekly contact to make sure the older youth's needs are being met.

Office Coverage

Employees returning to the workplace will be implemented in phases. Your local leadership will have more information in the coming days. We will continue to serve the public by appointment only until at least May 24, 2020.

Remote Work Plans

The current process used to assign work to staff will continue to be utilized.

Training

Cohort, continuing education, resource parent training is being conducted online via Microsoft Teams. The mentorship program should be encouraged to be held virtually, through Skype, Webex or Microsoft Teams. Laptops are being mailed to local offices for staff in cohort.

Preventive actions to help contain the spread of respiratory viruses:

- CDC: How to Protect Yourself.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick and stay home if you are sick.
- Maintain a distance of approximately 6 feet from others when possible.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Wipe down the things you touch often — doorknobs, phone screens, home, and workplace equipment — with disinfecting wipes.

Essential and Non-Essential Travel

In-state travel protocols are status quo. Remember to take the recommended precautions of washing your hands, practicing social distancing, etc. Staff will travel out of state only to complete essential functions related to child safety. If planning to travel out of state, please consult with your regional manager. Requests will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. No DCS staff member will attend any conferences, in state or out of state, until further notice.

There is a page on the DCS website with guidance for various programs and stakeholders regarding COVID-19.

To get the most updated information on COVID-19:

Indiana State Department of Health

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Please continue to check your email regularly for any changes or updates as this issue continues to evolve. Thank you for your dedication to providing quality services to our children and families during these uncertain times, while also taking steps to maintain the health and well-being of staff, partners, families and children.

Full details on the governor's plan can be found at backontrack.in.gov. We will work within these guidelines within the coming weeks to develop plans to meet the needs of individual counties. I appreciate your patience as we finalize these details.

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