

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Foster Care Circular March 27, 2020

The safety and wellness our foster parents is an important consideration so *effective immediately*, the following changes to current policy and practice requirements are in effect. Please note that these instructions will be continue to be adapted based on public health guidance.

Ongoing contact between agency workers, foster parents and children in care

While ongoing contact is required to support foster parents, workers will consider alternative approaches such as email, telephone and Skype.

Where face-to-face contact and/or home visits are required, workers will ask a series of screening questions before going into a home. When a home visit proceeds, foster parents and workers are expected to practice social distancing, handwashing before and after, and other general health prevention strategies.

Foster parents are also encouraged to screen workers, therapists, or others attending the home on behalf of a child and family services agency. For guidance on how to screen visitors, see 'Day to Day Care During COVID-19 Service Practice Guidance' which was distributed on March 18, 2020.

Activities that children in care and foster parents attend (including family visits):

Foster parents and children in care should practice social distancing. Children in care should not be attending non-essential events or activities and foster parents should consult with the guardian CFS agency if they are unsure what is deemed essential. If children in care are medically compromised, foster parents should consult with the legal guardian and health care practitioners as needed. Additional action may be required.

Family visits:

If family/sibling visits are scheduled, the guardian agency must provide foster parents with direction on whether protective measures need to be taken and/or if the visit is continuing. Workers will consider who is attending and the location of these visits. Workers will follow all public health advice related to screening, hand washing and other infection prevention measures.

If a parent/sibling/family member or the child in care is self-isolating, foster parents and the child's worker should consider alternatives to maintain important connections and contact for the child. If a child's family visits are court ordered, the agency may need to seek legal advice.

School/day programs/child care attendance:

Continuous care (as age and ability require) must still be provided to children in care who will be staying home as a result of services being suspended in K-12 schools and licensed child care centres. Foster parents should maintain regular contact with the school and child care centre.

If additional supports are required, foster parents should discuss this with the CFS guardian agency.

COVID-19 health concerns: child in care

If a child in care shows symptoms and may have been exposed to COVID-19, contact Health Links (204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257) or the child's physician for direction. There is also an online screening tool that can provide guidance at www.manitoba.ca/covid19.

Provide immediate notification to the guardian CFS agency.

If self-isolation or self-monitoring is recommended by health care providers, children in care should remain isolated within their home placement. Self-isolation should also occur with all members of the household. If assistance is required with essential supplies (i.e. medications), contact the assigned worker for support.

If a child is hospitalized due to COVID-19, a critical incident report should be completed. Daily updates should be provided to the assigned worker and the CFS guardian agency.

COVID-19 health concerns: foster care provider

If a foster care provider shows symptoms and may have been exposed to COVID-19, they should contact Health Links (204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257) or their health care provider for direction. There is also an online screening tool that can provide guidance at www.manitoba.ca/covid19.

Immediately notify the CFS licensing agency and the CFS guardian agency of all children in care placed in the home. Assigned agencies will work together on next steps, considering:

- self-isolation of children in care remaining in the foster placement;
- placement and care needs of children in care, in the event the foster parent is unable to provide care due to illness;
- the need for additional resources, including respite; and
- the advice of public health officials, which must be followed.

Supports to caregivers of children in care

It is critical to support caregivers of children in care to ensure ongoing needs are met. Please consult with your licensing agency and the CFS guardian agency if you require additional supports due to COVID-19.

Additional references include How to Talk to Kids about COVID-19 (attached) and the Shared Health website at <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/>.