

CIRCULAR

Date: April 6, 2020

CIRCULAR NUMBER: COVID#: 2020-52

To: Group care facilities, caregivers of children in care, essential support service staff and families of children in care.

This includes group homes, treatment homes, foster homes, places of safety and emergency shelters and any other place that a child in care resides.

Subject: **Visitation, including access to a child in care, family visits and essential service contact with all children in care.**

Program(s): All

Type: Policy For Internal Reference Only
 Procedure Information Only

Effective Date Immediately

All in-person visits - including family visits - are to be temporarily altered and/or suspended. This includes visits that normally occur in CFS offices, group homes, foster homes, respite settings or any other place where the contact is face-to-face. This includes all support service staff (including therapists, support staff, respite providers) who must provide services in alternate formats. If respite or specialized support is required, the guardian agency will provide direction on this on a case-by-case situation.

This decision was not an easy one to make. However, face-to-face activities and movement of adults and children must be restricted and suspended to mitigate the risk of exposure of COVID-19 to caregivers, staff and youth/children in care.

In exceptional circumstances, only one person at a time may visit a placement or home if the visitor is considered to be absolutely essential, and is approved by the legal guardian. This is to be done only when all other options for contact have been exhausted and the only way to maintain the best interests of a child's mental health and well-being. Essential visitors may include family members, friends, companions, or specialized service providers who can uniquely provide comfort to the child or youth.

Visitor exceptions must be reviewed and approved as "essential" by the CFS guardian agency and in consultation with the care provider on a case-by-case basis.

Even if approved on an exceptional basis, all visitors must undergo risk assessment screening by staff at the facility, agency or department. Visitors who have cold or flu

symptoms, or have been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19, or who have traveled outside of Manitoba within the last 14 days, **must not** enter the placement setting. Essential visitors who on very rare case-by-case exceptions are granted access to enter a facility or home must wash their hands when entering and leaving, and more frequently if appropriate, and follow respiratory etiquette by coughing or sneezing into their sleeve or a tissue.

Family Visits:

Family contact is deemed an essential activity that supports the well-being of children, youth and parents. CFS agencies and the alternate care provider should work together to ensure some form of family contact occurs. This may include use of social media, telephone calls, sending pictures or videos etc.

Support Staff and Service Providers:

All therapists, psychologists, elders, and others who may be providing key services and support to a child in care must make every effort to continue to provide their services through an alternate means. If this cannot be accommodated, the guardian CFS agency, alternate care provider and the service provider will consult and decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis.

These measures, while necessary to protect residents, children and staff, may be difficult to implement. We appreciate that CFS agencies, authorities and placements with alternate caregivers are doing their best and that limitations regarding internet access and geographical barriers may be challenging. Every effort will be made to utilize alternate means of contact to ensure families, children and youth remain connected to the important people in their lives.

All screening for suspected cases of the virus are be referred to Health Links at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257. A self-assessment tool and the most up-to-date information on COVID-19 can be found at www.manitoba.ca/covid19.

If you have any other questions, please contact your organization or agency and seek guidance.

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Child and Family Services

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Community Service Delivery