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March 18, 2020

To All

RE: COVID-19 Questions and Answers and Service Practice Guidance

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, its effect on all of us is becoming more and more significant. I am sure you and your staff have questions about what this means for the delivery of child and family services throughout Manitoba.

As you know, child and family services is a mandated essential service with obligations outlined under the Child and Family Services Act, the Child and Family Services Authorities Act, and the Adoptions Act. Protecting children to ensure their safety and well-being continues to be of paramount importance during this unprecedented time.

The safety and well-being of frontline service staff is also critical as the services that you provide offer lifelines of support for the most vulnerable children, youth and families. The attached COVID-19 guidelines are effective immediately, and as this situation evolves, we will be providing Practice and Policy Circulars to ensure the most effective communication.

The attached guidelines align with current Public Health direction to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 and ensure foster parents, group care providers, child welfare agencies, Authority staff, and all key stakeholders have access to information that will guide your day-to-day practice. As practice intersects, we are sharing these guidelines with everyone. The guidelines cover the below topics.

Child and Family Services Practice Guidelines

1. COVID-19 Health Concerns
 - 1.1. Child in Care
 - 1.2. Care Provider (Foster Parent or Group Care Staff)
2. Home Visits (by workers or anyone else visiting the home)
 - 2.1. COVID-19 Screening Questions
 - 2.2. Documentation guidelines

3. Supports to Caregivers of Children in Care
 - 3.1. Family/Sibling Visits, Services and Court Ordered Access
 - 3.2. Alternative Approaches to Ongoing Contact with Children, Families and Service Partners
 - 3.3. School/Day Programs/Daycare Attendance

4. Day-To-Day Care during COVID-19
 - 4.1. Reassurance
 - 4.2. Listen
 - 4.3. Maintain Routine
 - 4.4. Limit Media Access
 - 4.5. No-Sharing Policy
 - 4.6. Social Distancing
 - 4.7. Cleaning Surfaces and Objects

The division has also attached a list of Questions and Answers that you may wish to circulate to staff and stakeholders, as well as a resource to assist anyone with how to talk to Children and Youth about COVID-19.

I encourage you to remain up-to-date on the information available on the [Manitoba Government COVID-19](#) website.

If you have practice questions or concerns, please raise them with your CFS agency or Authority, your organizational supervisors and management and then with your key contacts at the Branch.

Manitoba Families will continue to work closely with local public health officials and other partners to monitor, gather information, assess risk and respond as new information becomes available. Thank you for your continued efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19 as we all work together to ensure the well-being of our clients and all Manitobans.

Sincerely,

“Original Signed By”

Sarah Thiele
Assistant Deputy Minister
Child and Youth Services Division
Manitoba Families

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Child and Family Services Practice Guidance March 17, 2020

While the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve in Manitoba, the risk of contracting this virus in Manitoba is still low, according to provincial public health experts. The provincial website www.manitoba.ca/covid19 will continue to have the most up to date information, so please check this site regularly.

As an essential service, the Director of Child and Family Services, the governing four Authorities and child and family services agencies are required to continue to fulfill their obligations under *The Child, Youth and Family Services Act* and *The Adoptions Act*. This is particularly true for our work related to assessing safety and risk and ensuring the well-being of children in care. The safety and wellness of staff is also paramount so, *effective immediately*, the following modifications are being made to current policy and practice requirements. Please note that these instructions will be adapted as Manitoba Health's guidance to Manitobans evolves.

Home Visits

CFS agency staff will continue to need to meet with families however, before going to a home to meet with a client during assessment or casework duties, consider the following.

Screening Questions

Before going on a home visit call the client and ask the following questions. These are based on screening questions used at health care centres (<https://sharedhealthmb.ca/files/covid-19-poe-screening-acute.pdf>).

- Has anyone in the home or a close contact been tested for COVID-19, and are either waiting for a test result or have had a positive result?
- Do you or anyone in the home have cold or flu symptoms?
 - *If yes to the second question:* Have you travelled internationally, including to the United States, in the past 14 days?

If the client does not meet these criteria, proceed as normal while doing your best to practice social distancing, hand washing before and after, and other general health prevention strategies.

If the client meets some of the criteria, try to rearrange the meeting for another time and reschedule when they are symptom free. You can also request to meet by phone or Skype if that is available and suitable.

If the client indicates that they are sick or have a confirmed case of COVID-19, do not visit the home and cancel all non-essential in-person meetings with them.

For unannounced visits and urgent matters, similar screening should be done at the door, where the worker can ask pertinent questions in regards to risk of illness in the home.

If you have been asked to respond to a home on an urgent matter and you have determined someone has symptoms or has been exposed to COVID-19, **do not enter the home**. Consult with your supervisor.

Documentation

As you gather information related to COVID-19, please record this in the CARE and CAUTION window of CFSIS as a **Special Caution**: Identify confirmed or suspected COVID-19. A case note should also be added to further reflect the details.

- a. Intake, Assessment, and ongoing case planning work:
 - i. any concerns regarding self-isolation/travel
 - ii. any consults with Manitoba Health Services
- b. Guardianship and Children in Care:
 - i. any need for the child and/or caregiver to self-isolate, concerns over exposure, return from travel.
 - ii. request for and/or denial of permission to travel

Please record in the CIC file on CFSIS in the medical section and update the CARE and CAUTION box in situations where a caseworker has been informed that a child in care has:

- been required to self-isolate,
- been referred for testing due to symptoms or exposure, or
- a confirmed positive test for COVID-19.

Supports to Caregivers of Children in Care

It is critical to support caregivers of children in care to ensure ongoing needs are met. Several provisions of existing foster care standards, group care standards and policy enable the provision of additional supports that may be required in exceptional circumstances. Please consult with your licensing organization and the CFS guardian agency.

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

Family/Sibling Visits, Services, Court Orders and Court Ordered Access

CFS agency workers will need to make case management decisions about what is in a child's best interest, in line with current advice from provincial public health officials. With the support of their Authorities, agencies must also consider your business continuity plans and how to manage essential service delivery and health and safety of all parties.

For example:

- If the family is the subject of a supervision order: Consider if alternate mechanisms to assessing and supervising could be sufficient. Seek legal advice.
- If a child requires ongoing therapeutic support: Consider having support provided through telephone or Skype
- If a parent/sibling/family member or the child in care is self-isolating: Consider alternate mechanisms to maintain important connections and contact with the child.
- If access is court ordered: Seek legal advice.

Ongoing Contact with Children, Families and Partners

While ongoing contact is required in order to support children and families with open files who are receiving services, consider alternative ways to maintain contact through email, telephone, Skype etc.

If case conferences have been scheduled, consider whether they need to proceed or if they can be done via teleconference, Skype etc. If in-person is necessary, please use all precautions advised by public health officials, including social distancing, cleansing of spaces, hand washing etc.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Foster Care Practice Guidelines

March 17, 2020

While the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve in Manitoba, the risk of contracting this virus in Manitoba is still low, according to provincial public health experts. The provincial website www.manitoba.ca/covid19 will continue to have the most up to date information, so please check this site regularly.

As an essential service, the Director of Child and Family Services, the governing four Authorities and child and family services agencies are required to continue to fulfill their obligations under *The Child, Youth and Family Services Act* and *The Adoptions Act*. This is particularly true for our work related to assessing safety and risk and ensuring the well-being of children in care. The safety and wellness of staff is also paramount so *effective immediately*, the following modifications are being made to current policy and practice requirements. Please note that these instructions will be adapted as Manitoba Health's guidance to Manitobans evolves.

Ongoing contact between Agency Workers, Foster Parents and Children in Care

While ongoing contact is required in order to support foster parents, consider alternative approaches to maintain contact through email, telephone, Skype etc.

Activities that CIC and Foster Parents Attend (including family visits):

Like all Manitobans, 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 on this 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. As additional action may be required.

Family Visits:

If family/sibling visits are scheduled, the guardian agency must provide direction on whether protective measures need to be taken and/or if the visit is continuing. Consider who is attending visits and the location of these visits, all public health advice should be followed related to screening questions for those attending visits and hand washing etc.

Foster parents should be encouraging and frequently practicing good handwashing hygiene with children in care.

School/Day Programs/Child Care Attendance:

Continuous care 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 facility. 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: <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/>. 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) and self-isolation is occurring in the home, 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: <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/>. Immediately notify the foster care worker and the CFS guardian agency of all children in care placed in the home.

Planning will occur with the assigned agencies (the foster licensing agency, and all CFS guardian agencies) on measures required based on circumstances. Things to consider include:

- 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.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Group Care Practice Guidelines

March 17, 2020

While the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve in Manitoba, the risk of contracting this virus in Manitoba is still low, according to provincial public health experts. The provincial website www.manitoba.ca/covid19 will continue to have the most up to date information, so please check this site regularly.

As an essential service, the Director of Child and Family Services, the governing four Authorities and child and family services agencies are required to continue to fulfill their obligations under *The Child, Youth and Family Services Act* and *The Adoptions Act*. This is particularly true for our work related to assessing safety and risk and ensuring the well-being of children in care. The safety and wellness of staff is also paramount so *effective immediately*, the following modifications are being made to current policy and practice requirements. Please note that these instructions will be adapted as Manitoba Health's guidance to Manitobans evolves.

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: <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/>.

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) and self-isolation is occurring in the home, 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: Group Care Staff

If a group care staff member 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: <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/>.

Staff should follow the direction of public health officials, notify their supervisor immediately, and follow their direction related to their pandemic plan and business continuity plan.

Staff who are away sick, or self-isolated or self-monitoring, must follow the employer's human resource policy on "away from work".

The employing agency should contact the licensing specialist and notify the director.

If a Child in Care or a Staff is Self-isolated

Follow the advice of public health officials, in consultation with the licensing specialist at the branch, CFS Authority and CFS guardian agency. (Note: More information will follow on this practice issue.)

Day-to Day-Care during COVID-19

Reassurance

Provide reassurance to children and youth about their personal safety and health. Telling children that it is okay to be concerned is comforting. Reassure them about their safety and explain there are many things they can do to stay healthy:

- **Hand washing:** Wash hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, or use a sanitizer, especially after coughing or sneezing and when handling food.
- **Cough/sneeze etiquette:** Cough and sneeze into arm or tissue.
- **Stay home when sick:** Children should tell staff if they not feeling well and together make a plan to stay home from school or other activities.
- **Keep clean:** Keep hands away from face and mouth.
- **Stay healthy:** Stay healthy by eating healthy foods, keeping physically active, getting enough sleep.

Listen to Children and Youth

Children and youth want to be heard. They do not need detailed information about events, but they do need to talk about their feelings.

Let them know they can ask questions. Answer questions honestly, but make sure that the information is suitable for their age level. If you do not know the answers to their questions, it is okay to say so and together look for resources that can answer their questions.

Remember children are often listening when you talk to others about COVID-19. Staff should be mindful of how children share information in less supervised settings e.g. before and after school, lunch and snack times, recess and on personal time. It may be in these settings where children can become misinformed. It will be important for administrators and staff to correct this misinformation as they become aware of it.

Maintain routines

Maintain familiar activities and routines in the group care setting as it can reinforce the sense of security of children and youth.

While outings to social gatherings are discouraged, getting outdoors for walks or to the park with children in care are generally safe activities. Creating opportunities for fun, school work and daily life activities is important.

Visitors to the homes

Before anyone visits the home, such as a social worker, therapist or family member, ask the following questions. These are based on screening questions used at health care centres (<https://sharedhealthmb.ca/files/covid-19-poe-screening-acute.pdf>).

- Have you or a close contact been tested for COVID-19, and are either waiting for a test result or have had a positive result?
- Do you have cold or flu symptoms?
 - *If yes to the second question:* Have you travelled internationally, including to the United States, in the past 14 days?

If the visitor does not meet these criteria, proceed as normal while doing your best to practice social distancing, hand washing before and after, and other general health prevention strategies.

If the visitor meets some or all of the criteria, try to rearrange the meeting for another time and reschedule when they are symptom free. You can also request to meet by phone or Skype if that is available and suitable.

Pay attention to media access

Limit media exposure or ensure information accessed on-line is reputable. Exposure to too much or misinformed resources and media coverage can give children and adults an exaggerated view of the risks association with COVID-19. It may be easier to limit exposure in younger children, but this may be more difficult with age. Where feasible, monitor for misinformation and assist children and youth in accessing reliable sources of information. Explain the events as well as you can and help children put information into perspective. Keep children informed about what is happening and what may happen at a level that is suitable for their age.

Reinforce "no sharing" policies

It will be important to reinforce no food or water bottle sharing policies in-group care settings. Generally, these policies are put in place in an effort to reduce potential exposures to allergens but the practice of not sharing food in the facility also helps reducing virus transmission between staff/children.

Maintain cleaning and disinfecting policies

Increased monitoring of hand cleaning supplies is recommended to ensure all sinks in washrooms, kitchens and laundry areas are well-stocked with hand washing supplies at all times (i.e., soap and single-use towels).

As per standard procedures, it is recommended that facilities have toys that are easily cleaned and disinfected (e.g., avoid plush toys). It may be prudent to increase the frequency of the cleaning schedule for these items, especially when illness is circulating in the setting or the local community or if symptomatic staff/children have been touching the toys.

Care providers are encouraged to review existing activities and practices within their settings to help determine where enhancements or increased cleaning frequencies may be recommended.

High-Touch Surfaces: It is recommended that high-touch objects and surfaces (e.g. pencil sharpeners, doorknobs, faucet handles, remote controls, toys, electronic devices and small appliances) in facilities are cleaned and disinfected regularly and that this process is monitored.

Cleaning Products: Although there is lack of specific evidence for their effectiveness against COVID-19, cleaning with water and household detergents and use of common disinfectant products should be sufficient for cleaning and disinfection in facilities. If household or disinfectant cleaning products are not readily available, hard surfaces can be disinfected using a mixture of one-part bleach (5% sodium hypochlorite) and nine parts water, ensuring the diluted solution makes contact with the surface for one minute for disinfection.

COVID-19 – Talking with Children and Youth

A new virus such as the one that causes COVID-19 can create anxiety and be difficult for children and youth to understand, especially if someone near them is sick, or they see or hear troubling messages on the radio, internet or television. It is normal for children to feel worried or nervous and have questions. Communication should reflect the diverse linguistic, literacy and cultural characteristics and needs of the children. It will be important for facility staff to monitor for discrimination and/or bullying surrounding COVID-19, in particular towards those who are being monitored for symptoms. Program staff should make all efforts to ensure that misinformation is clarified and anti-discrimination/bullying protocols are adhered to.

Program staff will need to pay attention to children's feelings and reactions. How the situation is handled will strongly affect how children will respond. Group care settings can consider the following:

Provide reassurance

Reassure children and youth about their personal safety and health. Telling children that it is okay to be concerned is comforting. Reassure them that they are safe and there are many things they can do to stay healthy:

- **Hand washing:** Wash hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, or use a sanitizer, especially after coughing or sneezing and when handling food.
- **Cough/sneeze etiquette:** Cough and sneeze into arm or tissue.
- **Stay home when sick:** Children should tell staff if not feeling well, and together, make a plan to stay home from school.
- **Keep clean:** Keep hands away from face and mouth.
- **Stay healthy:** Stay healthy by eating healthy foods, keeping physically active, getting enough sleep.

Listen to Children and Youth

Children and youth want to be heard. They do not need detailed information about events but they do need to talk about their feelings. Let them know they can ask questions. Answer questions honestly but make sure that the information is suitable for their age level. If you do not know the answers to their questions, it is okay to say so and together look for resources that can answer their questions. Remember children are often listening when you talk to others about COVID-19. Staff should be mindful of how children share information in less supervised settings e.g. before and after school, lunch and snack times, recess and on personal time. It may be in these settings where children can become misinformed. It will be important for administrators and staff to correct this misinformation when they are made aware of it.

Maintain routines

Maintain familiar activities and routines in the group care setting as it can reinforce the sense of security of children and youth.

Pay attention to media access

Limit media exposure or ensure information being accessed on-line is reputable. Exposure to too much or misinformed resources/media coverage can give children and adults an exaggerated view of the risks association with COVID-19. It may be easier to limit exposure in younger children but this may be more difficult with age. Where feasible, monitor for misinformation and assist children and youth in accessing reliable sources of information. Explain the events as well as you can and help children put information into perspective. Keep children informed about what is happening and what may happen at a level that is suitable for their age.

Child and Family Services Q&A For CFS Authorities and Agencies

Where can I get more information about COVID-19?

The **Manitoba Government COVID-19 website** provides up-to-date, evidence-based advice that all Manitobans should follow.

How will Child and Family Services be maintained? What are essential services?

- Manitoba's CFS Authorities are responsible for ensuring the delivery of services.
- Agency CFS staff will continue to provide mandated service for children, which includes child protection.
- Agencies are implementing business continuity plans to maintain essential services.
- Agencies have a legal duty to protect children. Agencies are responsible for determining if a child is in need of protection, including immediate investigation of child protection matters and reporting conclusions to various parties.
- Essential services such as intake, after-hours, responding to concerns of child protection and the ongoing support of children in care will be maintained but may require flexible and alternate service delivery approaches as defined by business continuity planning and in response to directives from provincial public health officials.
- Further direction on CFS practice guidelines and suggested modifications to practice will be shared from the Department of Families.
- Depending on the evolution of the COVID-19 situation, decisions may need to be made about how to further adjust services.
- Documentation in CFSIS remains a requirement.

What is the Manitoba Government doing to protect front-line CFS employees and the services they deliver from COVID-19?

- The health and safety of CFS employees is a priority for the Manitoba government and for the four CFS Authorities and agencies.
- Prior to COVID-19, CFS Agencies and front-line staff have experience with implementing health precautions in response to existing infectious diseases. These should be followed, while also following current public health advice on social distancing, handwashing, etc.
- There remains an obligation to provide essential services, including child and family services, while utilizing up-to-date advice from the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer.
- Further direction on CFS practice guidelines and suggested modifications to practice will be shared from the Department of Families.

- Agencies are implementing business continuity plans to maintain essential services.
- The Manitoba government is in the process of finalizing a purchase of supplies that may be utilized by front-line service providers based on the advice of the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer.

What happens if a child in care or one of their caregivers tests positive for COVID-19?

- Agencies are to notify their mandating authority and the director of child welfare simultaneously.
- The Department of Families will coordinate a response with the licensing agency and guardian to determine what is in the best interest of the child and care providers.
- Public health officials will be contacted to assess the matter and provide direction.
- The Department of Families will help the agency and placement provider to ensure that all public health directives are followed, including communication to others who would need to know.

What happens if an agency staff member exhibits symptoms or tests positive?

- Staff should be directed to stay home if they are feeling unwell. Agencies should follow public health advice on the Manitoba government website and internal Human Resource policies and procedures as outlined by boards of directors.
- Staff should call Health Links at 204-788-8200 or toll-free at 1-888-315-9257 or complete the online screening tool to determine if they should be tested: www.manitoba.ca/covid19.

What CFS agencies have announced closures in Manitoba? How should we connect with another agency?

- Some CFS agencies have closed their offices but continue to provide essential services in accordance with business continuity planning.
- CFS Authorities will have the most up to date information on any office closures.
- Use email to connect with agency management and staff.

Child and Family Services Q&A For CFS Placement Resources – e.g. Foster Care and Group Care

Where can I get more information about COVID-19?

The Manitoba Government COVID-19 website provides up-to-date, evidence-based advice that all Manitobans should follow.

What is the Manitoba government doing to protect children in care and their care providers from COVID-19?

- The health and safety of children in care and their care providers is a priority for Manitoba and for CFS agencies and Authorities.
- Care providers are an important and integral part of the child and family services system and are relied upon to provide daily care and a home for a child. Therefore, the least disruption in the care of children is a priority.
- We know that this situation is causing concern among care providers about potential health risks. Our health care system is working hard and is well prepared to manage this situation and to monitor, detect and contain this evolving issue.
- It is important that care providers remain calm. Care providers have experience in caring for children and with implementing health precautions in response to other existing infectious diseases. These should be followed, in addition to the current public health advice on social distancing, handwashing, etc.
- Funding is provided to care providers to support the everyday care of a child, including health care costs such as prescriptions or for a thermometer to monitor temperature.
- There is still an obligation to provide essential services, including child and family services, while following up-to-date advice from the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer.
- CFS Authorities, agencies and third-party care providers are implementing business continuity plans to maintain essential services.
- CFS staff will continue to provide mandated service for children, which includes child protection. Further direction on CFS practice and suggested modifications to practice will be shared in the next day or two.
- The Manitoba government is in the process of finalizing a purchase of supplies that may be utilized by front-line service providers based on the advice of the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer.

Are care providers at risk if they interact with children?

- As of March 17, 2020, no children in Manitoba have tested positive for COVID-19.
- Care providers should continue to interact with and care for children but can follow public health advice which includes:
 - ✓ wash hands often with soap and water
 - ✓ sneeze and cough into your sleeve
 - ✓ avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
 - ✓ practice the principles of social distancing
 - ✓ avoid contact with people who are sick
 - ✓ stay home if you are sick
- Please see the attached resource on talking with children and youth on COVID-19.
- If you or children in your care exhibit cold or flu-like symptoms, advise the guardian agency as soon as possible.

What if a care provider or child in care tests positive for COVID-19?

- As of March 17, 2019, no children in Manitoba have tested positive for COVID-19.
- Alternate care providers are an important and essential child and family service. Your safety and continuation of the daily care provided to children in care is a priority.
- The guardian agency(s) should be notified if a care provider or child in care is being tested for COVID-19.
- Public health officials will be contacted to assess the matter and provide direction.
- The Department of Families will work with the licensing agency and a third-party care provider if that is the case, to help ensure that all public health directives are followed, including communication to others who would need to know.