

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Child Welfare Services (CWS) Caregiver Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Related to COVID-19

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Introduction

In support of the County of San Diego's effort to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and to ensure the health and safety of our caregivers dependent children, and parents, below are FAQ's which provide information about the operational changes to Child Welfare Services (CWS) during this public health crisis.

Background of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Coronavirus disease 2019 (also known as COVID-19) is a novel coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China. The virus is a respiratory illness known to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

Transmission can also occur if a person touches their face after contact with surfaces or objects where the virus is living. Symptoms of the illness include fever, cough, and shortness of breath, sore throat, muscle pain, repeated shaking, chills and a loss of taste of smell.

Everyday Preventative Actions and Social Distancing

In an effort to prevent people from getting sick all at once, a statewide public health order was issued on March 19, ordering all individuals to stay home except to take care of essential needs or go to an essential job.

The best way to protect yourself and your family is to:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or your elbow.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Practice social distancing by keeping at least six feet away from other people
- Avoid gatherings of any size

Additional information and resources:

- Text COSD COVID10 to 468-311 to get text alert updates.
- Contact your healthcare provider for health or testing related questions.
- Call [2-1-1 San Diego](tel:211) for general questions about COVID-19, information about community resources or if you are uninsured
- <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/coronavirus.html>
- Rady Children's Hospital Nurse Advice Line at 858-966-8399, 8 a.m. to 10:00pm, seven days a week

What should I do if the child/youth in my care or a member of my household becomes sick?

If you or someone in your household develops symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath you should:

- Stay at home, unless you are having a medical emergency.
- Notify your primary care physician and seek medical advice.
- Notify the child/youths' social worker as soon as possible.

For more information on the Medi-Cal Program, call 1-866-262-9881.

Are CWS lobbies open?

No.

Effective July 6, 2020 the following CWS lobbies are available by appointment only:

- 8965 Balboa Avenue (CWS Administration)
- 8911 Balboa Avenue (Resource Family Approval and Adoptions)
- 9400 Ruffin Road (Polinsky Children's Center)
- 17701 San Pasqual Valley Road (San Pasqual Academy)
- 7947 Mission Center Court (North Central Region, CWS Eligibility, Residential, Extended Foster Care)
- 4305 University Avenue (Central Region)
- 389 N. Magnolia Avenue (East Region)
- 1320 Union Plaza Court (North Coastal Region)
- 649 W. Mission Avenue (North Inland Live Well Center)
- 303 H Street (South Region)

CWS offices have posted signs with options for phone and/or email services. Personal protective equipment will be available for clients that do not have a facial covering.

Live Scan operations will continue in order to approve caregivers for the placement of children. The following CWS office lobbies remain open only for providing Live Scan Services. You may contact the offices below for appointments.

- 8911 Balboa Avenue (Resource Family Approval and Adoptions)-858-650-5995
- 649 W. Mission Avenue (North Inland Live Well Center)-760-740-3686

Is the San Diego Superior Court Juvenile Dependency Operations still open?

Effective July 27, 2020, the Vista Courthouse resumed operations and began hearing juvenile court cases virtually via Microsoft Teams.

The Meadow Lark and East Region Courthouse are open. Social Worker's will notify parents, non-minor dependents and caregivers about any courthouse closures and hearing continuances.

Is Polinsky Children's Center (PCC) still open?

Yes.

Medical professionals assess all new entries into PCC for signs of illness, as well as any staff who enter the facility. Visitors who exhibit symptoms will not be allowed to visit, however staff are assisting with remote visits such as Google Duo, Bluejeans, or Webex.

How is CWS ensuring employee safety while interacting with the public?

CWS staff are required to wear facial coverings. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is provided and priority is given to field workers and employees with a high degree of public contact/interaction. Staff are encouraged to:

- avoid contact with those who are sick, to the extent possible considering

individually required job duties.

- maintain a distance of 6 feet from other people.
- stay home when sick.
- avoid touching their mouth, eyes, nose, and ears with unwashed hands.
- wash hands often with both soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are unavailable.
- alert building facilities/maintenance if there is an area that requires attention or replenishment of sanitation supplies.
- use virtual meeting options such as Microsoft Teams, BlueJeans, or Webex.

Is CWS still investigating child abuse reports?

Yes.

CWS is a critical government agency and must continue to operate. However, operational modifications may be necessary in order to support the health and safety of staff and the children and families we serve.

What should I expect if an RFA social worker (SW) and/or Emergency Response SW comes to my home to conduct an investigation?

The RFA SW and the Emergency (ER) worker will screen for possible COVID-19 exposure prior to each visit to the home. Both social worker will maintain 6 feet of social distancing and use PPE.

The social workers may call the home to pre-screen for COVID-19 exposure/symptoms before making the in-person visit if the call does not compromise the investigations or health and safety of the identified victim, and use PPE (masks and gloves).

The ER Social Worker can utilize announced visits and video conference communication to complete the rest of the contacts needed for the investigation. Telephone interviews will be conducted only as last result.

Will social workers have monthly contact visits with children/youth?

Yes.

Per requirements from the California Department of Social Services, Social Worker's must still meet this requirement. Effective July 1, 2020 monthly in-person contact visits resumed. The Administration for Children and Families has authorized the use of videoconferencing for monthly contact with children and youth in limited circumstances, such as the declaration of an emergency that prohibits or strongly discourages in-person contact for public health reasons. CWS will assess to see if an in-person visit is necessary or if a videoconference visit is acceptable. Determining the need for an in-person visit is dependent upon the specific factors of each case. If a social worker determines that they need to see a child in-person, please work with them to make those arrangements. Telephone interviews with children/youth, without video conferencing capability, do not meet the requirement for a monthly visit, but may be used to gather information or provide support.

If a videoconference visit is acceptable, what is expected of me?

The social worker will schedule a time and an agreed upon means of communication. The

social worker will ask you to ensure that the child/youth has a private space to talk during the videoconference.

If an in-person visit is necessary, what should I expect?

The social worker will screen for exposure for COVID -19 by asking if:

- You or a household member have experienced a fever, cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing.
- In the last 14 days, have you come into close contact with someone who is known to have COVID-19?
- In the last 14 days, have you traveled to an area with widespread, ongoing COVID-19 transmission? [Click here for the most recent list from the CDC](#)

The social worker will maintain 6-feet of social distancing.

How will in-person visitations between parents and children/youth and between siblings occur?

Visitation between parents and children is an essential part of the reunification process. On April 9, 2020, the Juvenile Court ordered that the social worker must assess the needs and safety of the child (ren), caregiver, and parent and determine that visitation would not be detrimental to the safety or health of any person involved. All efforts will be made to communicate and provide information to all parties in order to address concerns timely due to the lack of in-person visitation. Social workers will assist with arranging virtual visits via FaceTime, Skype, Google Duo or other acceptable platforms.

If an in-person visitation is assessed to be safe and appropriate, the social worker will help to arrange this visit through communication with both the birth and resources parents. Prior to any in-person visits, the resource parent should also be asking the screening questions related to COVID-19:

- Are you experiencing any of the following symptoms: fever, cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing?
- In the last 14 days, have you come into close contact with someone who is known to have COVID-19?
- In the last 14 days, have you traveled to an area with widespread, ongoing COVID-19 transmission? [Click here for the most recent list from the CDC](#)

The visit should not occur if any member of the visit arrives with symptoms and should be stopped if anyone shows symptoms during the visit.

What about children on overnight visits or unsupervised visits with their parents/guardians?

A social worker will evaluate this on a case-by-case basis and determine if a 60-day trial visit would be appropriate or if an extended visit should be allowed.

For unsupervised visits, the social worker will work with the parents and caregiver, and child/youth to create a consistent schedule including the frequency, duration, location, and individuals present. The social worker will screen for risk of COVID-19 a day before the visit and remind all parties to wear a facial covering during the visit.

Will Child and Family Team (CFT) Meetings still happen?

Yes.

CFT meetings should continue to be held, but these meeting should be held virtually.

Will Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) conduct in-person visits a child/youth?

No.

On June 24, 2020, Voices for Children issued a new policy, which states that in-person visits are not mandatory. If a CASA does plan to conduct an in-person visit, they must follow additional criteria in addition to the county health orders, including that all visits must be outdoors and they may not transport children.

Is Rady Children's Chadwick Center still providing services?

Yes.

Rady Children's Hospital remains open and continues to provide critical services such as the Chadwick Center. The mental health team continues to see children and families; however, all Chadwick Therapists (KidSTART, Trauma Counseling, and Child and Family Traumatic Stress Intervention (CFTSI)) are prioritizing caseloads, and those with urgent needs will continue. Some clients will be converted to Zoom visits, and some visits may be postponed.

Are Well-Child Exams being offered?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)/Bright Futures has developed guidance on the provision of services via telehealth during the pandemic. Well-child care should occur in person, whenever possible. Health care providers are encouraged to prioritize in-person newborn care, and well visits and immunizations of infants and young children (through 24 months of age), whenever possible.

Caregivers should still schedule wellness exams, but some components of the exam may be done through telehealth.

Is the San Diego Regional Center (SDRC) still providing services?

Yes.

The San Diego Regional Center is still providing services and support, but their offices are not open for visitors and day programs have been suspended. The SDRC is conducting intake meetings, evaluations and assessments by remote electronic communications. If the Regional Center is reasonably certain that the individual is eligible for services, but due to current COVID-19 circumstances is unable to make a definitive determination, they may determine the individual presumptive eligible.

How are Behavioral Health Services being provided?

The California Department of Health Care Services has allowed behavioral health services to be provided by telephone and telehealth to ensure access to health and safety. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services has relaxed HIPAA Rules to ensure providers have the ability to leverage telehealth to ensure access to services and reduce the spread of disease. You may find therapists continuing service through audio or video communication.

How are educational needs for children/youth in foster care being provided?

Educational liaisons are working with social workers to support children and their caregivers in

meeting their educational needs. Contact the child's social worker for assistance to ensure the child/youth receives distance learning plans and at-home learning options.

Are there technology resources for foster youth?

Yes.

iFoster is currently offering technology access to foster youth ages 13-24, which includes free unlimited high-speed data hotspots, headsets, and laptops to assist with online classes. For additional information and resources, you may call or email iFoster at 1-855-936-7837 or phone@ifoster.org.

What if I still need to work and need childcare?

The Emergency Child Care Bridge Program is working diligently to support resource families who are working or attending school during this time of need. Caregivers can ask the child's social worker to submit a referral to the Child Care Bridge Program.

Are Head Start Programs still open?

The Neighborhood House Association Head Start programs that are conducted with San Diego Unified School District and National School District, as well as those in City and Mesa College are closed. The Miller and Walker Head Start locations are closed and the home visitation programs are suspended.

The Child Development Center at Grossmont College remains open.

What is the status of Camp Connect?

All Camp Connect activities and outings are postponed. Further events will be held once social distancing restrictions are lifted.

For more information, call the KidsLine at 877-792 (KIDS) (5437).