



# PROVIDING FOSTER CARE AS MASSACHUSETTS MANAGES CORONAVIRUS INFORMATION FOR FOSTER FAMILIES MARCH 20, 2020

The processes by which the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the foster parents and community-based organizations they partner with can continue to do the important work of supporting kids and families while preventing and mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 are evolving, sometimes daily. This document is intended to provide information to guide you during these times. It will be updated to reflect new information as it becomes available and will be updated on [mspcc.org/kidsnet](https://mspcc.org/kidsnet).

## DCF IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

- Area offices are staffed by a small number of supervisors and staff during regular business hours, Monday- Friday, 8:45 am - 5:00pm.
- All other DCF staff are working remotely. Workers are using phone, email and FaceTime to communicate with foster families- adults and children. Workers may also make an in-person visit as needed (see home visits below).

## ROUTINE COMMUNICATION

**Your family resource worker and the social worker for a child remain your primary and best contact points.** Email is the most reliable way to communicate with them but they are also regularly checking voicemail. You can also include the worker's supervisor in your communication.

**Area Offices'** ([www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-department-of-children-families/locations](https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-department-of-children-families/locations)) phones will be answered during regular business hours. If you do not receive a timely response from a family resource worker or social worker, please call the Area Office for assistance.

## AFTER HOURS URGENT AND EMERGENCY SUPPORT

### **Judge Baker Massachusetts Child Abuse Emergency Line 800-792-5200**

The MA Child Abuse Emergency Line is available evenings, weekends and holidays when the DCF Area offices are closed. Social workers and mental health counselors are available by phone to take reports of missing children (runaways) and to respond to mandated reporters and others who are concerned about the wellbeing of a child. In situations where a child is at imminent risk, including a child in need of medical or mental health hospital admission, staff can consult with on-call DCF Supervisors and Emergency Response Social workers to initiate an emergency response.

## NON EMERGENCY SUPPORT

### **Kid's Net Helpline 800-486-3730**

Through April 3, 2020, the Kid's Net Helpline will be available to foster parents 24 hours a day. The Helpline will be staffed by social workers experienced in foster care who can provide information and support and help resolve non-emergency issues.

**Kids Net Staff** [www.mspcc.org/kidsnet/](http://www.mspcc.org/kidsnet/)

Kid's Net Directors and Family Resource Liaisons (FRLs) are available in every community as a source of support and to connect you with information and resources.

## OUTREACH AND HOME VISITS

DCF Family Resource Workers and child social workers have been directed to check in with the children and families assigned to them by phone or FaceTime. If after these contacts, and in consultation with a supervisor, it is determined an imminent situation exists necessitating a face-to-face contact, plans for a home visit will be made. These visits will be conducted after making a routine assessment of the health of the individuals in the home and while there, the worker will use common-sense precautions to reduce potential exposure to COVID-19.

If there are multiple workers connected to a foster home, workers are being encouraged to coordinate a single visit to reduce the number of visitors in a home.

If you are concerned about an in-person visit you should discuss your concerns with the worker and, if necessary, seek support from the Area Office.

## VISITS WITH FAMILY OR VISITING RESOURCES

At this point there is no prohibition on visits with family or visiting resources. However, given the need to take precautions to limit exposure to COVID-19 and limits on the availability of resources to support supervised visits, foster parents should be in communication with the child's worker to discuss the particular needs and circumstances of the child in order to make a determination regarding visits that is right for that particular child. In those circumstances where children are unable to spend time with their families, foster families and social workers should discuss whether increasing telephone access and/or FaceTime is an appropriate option for children to connect with loved ones.

## PLACEMENTS AND PLANNED REMOVALS

Placements and planned removals are continuing as appropriate. Questions regarding placements should be directed to the child's social worker.

## HEALTH CARE

### **Reporting medical conditions and concerns:**

All medical conditions and concerns regarding a child or a foster parent, including those related to Covid-19, should be communicated to the child's worker by e-mail.

### **Emergency Supplies of Medication:**

MassHealth has approved access to early renewal of medication to enable families to access an emergency supply. Initially, this did not include behavioral health medications however, effective March 20, 2020, these prescriptions are now included.