



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Social Services

ROY COOPER • Governor

MANDY COHEN, MD, MPH • Secretary

SUSAN OSBORNE • Assistant Secretary for County Operations
for Human Services

Date: June 8, 2020

**DEAR COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES
DEAR EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OF FOSTER CARE SERVICES PROVIDER AGENCIES**

ATTENTION: Directors, Program Managers and Foster Care Managers

SUBJECT: Guidance on in-person visitation for foster home settings

REQUIRED ACTION: Information Only Time Sensitive X Immediate

On March 20, 2020, the North Carolina Division of Social Services (NCDSS) issued a Dear County Directors' Letter providing guidance to local Departments of Social Services, on court-ordered visitation between parents/caregivers, children and youth in foster care. The guidance recommended that counties contact parents/caregivers and families with court-ordered visitation and request their consent to temporarily cease in-person visitations due to health and safety concerns caused by COVID-19. County child welfare staff worked diligently to transition to virtual visitations, helping children and youth in foster care placements maintain connections with their parents/caregivers and families while adhering to guidance informed by federal and state health officials. This letter and the attached guidance refer specifically to family foster care and resuming in-person visitation.

On May 20, 2020, Governor Roy Cooper signed Executive Order No. 141 to modify the current stay-at-home order and to transition the state into "Safer At Home" Phase 2 of lifting COVID-19 restrictions. As part of this structured, phased approach towards community reintegration, safety precautions are still promoted to support flattening of the curve and slowing the spread of COVID-19.

NCDSS is aware that some agencies have returned to or are preparing to resume in-person visitations. NCDSS is providing updated guidance on in-person visitations in order to promote consistency statewide while maintaining local flexibility to handle exceptional cases and/or localized outbreaks of the virus. Face-to face contact between parents/caregivers and children in out-of-home care is essential to the welfare of both children and their parents, and contributes to timely, positive permanency outcomes for children. While protecting the health and safety of children, youth and families is of paramount importance, so too is ensuring that parents/caregivers and children have time together to maintain and strengthen connections. Towards that end, in-person visitations should resume whenever best-practice safety measures allow.

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

LOCATION: 820 S. Boylan Avenue, McBryde Building, Raleigh, NC 27603
MAILING ADDRESS: 2409 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-2409
www.ncdhhs.gov • TEL: 919-527-6390 • FAX: 919-733-3052

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY / AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

There are some children and youth with underlying health conditions for whom continuing virtual visits remains in their best interest. In these cases, a consultation with their medical provider prior to resuming in-person visitation will be necessary.

Child welfare agencies need to prepare to facilitate and support families' interactions as community reintegration occurs. When making decisions about in-person visitations, county child welfare agencies are encouraged to consider all information available to them, including individual circumstances and any county or local orders that may be in effect. Additional information from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) can be accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> and from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services at: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/>.

Please refer to the enclosed guidance document for additional information. Should you have questions, please contact your regional child welfare consultant or, for private agencies, your assigned Program Consultant.

Help protect your family and neighbors from COVID-19. **[Know the 3 Ws. Wear. Wait. Wash.](#)** #StayStrongNC and get the latest at nc.gov/covid19.

Thank you for your anticipated participation and cooperation in this important process.

Sincerely,



Lisa Tucker Cauley
Deputy Director for Child Welfare
Division of Social Services

Cc: Susan Osborne, Assistant Secretary for County Operations
Teresa Strom, Section Chief for County Operations
Carla McNeill, Section Chief for Permanency Planning
Kathy Stone, Section Chief for Prevention and Safety
Linda Waite, Acting Section Chief for Regulatory and Licensing Services

Attachment: Guidance on In-Person Visitation for foster home settings

Sample visitation agreement

Sample screening tool

CWS-14-20

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

LOCATION: 820 S. Boylan Avenue, McBryde Building, Raleigh, NC 27603
MAILING ADDRESS: 2409 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-2409
www.ncdhhs.gov • TEL: 919-527-6390 • FAX: 919-733-3052

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY / AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER