



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

June 08, 2020

**DEAR COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES
DEAR EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OF RESIDENTIAL PROVIDER AGENCIES**

ATTENTION: Directors, Program Managers and Residential Managers

SUBJECT: Guidance for in-person visitation in congregate care settings

REQUIRED ACTION: Information Only Time Sensitive 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 receiving foster care services. 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 congregate care placements maintain connections with their parents/caregivers and families while adhering to guidance informed by federal and state health officials.

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 visits for children and youth living in congregate care in order to promote consistency statewide while maintaining local flexibility to handle exceptional cases and/or localized outbreaks of the virus. It is well known that congregate care living can pose a great risk for transmission of the virus and we encourage you to use every precaution available during this time.

Face-to-face contact between parents/caregivers and children in congregate 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 and the risk for spreading the virus throughout a congregate care setting can be minimized.

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LOCATION: 820 S. Boylan Avenue, McBryde Building, Raleigh, NC 27603

MAILING ADDRESS: 2409 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-2409

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We are strongly recommending that children should not leave congregate care facilities for overnight or weekend visits with parents, relatives or respite providers. If there are court orders requiring such visits, this should be addressed with a judge.

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. We encourage you to develop visitation plans with congregate care providers on a case-by-case basis.

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 and congregate care providers 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 for In-Person Visitation in congregate care settings
Sample visitation agreement
Sample screening tool

CWS-15-20

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