

## Children & Family Services Coronavirus – COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: 4/1/20

CFS has developed the following FAQ to provide information for providers and partners with respect to questions they may have about COVID-19. We provide frequent updates as we get additional guidance.

**March 26, 2020**

### Drug-Testing:

**Q: Given the extraordinary circumstances, what guidance can the Division provider give regarding our current position on drug-testing?**

In an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19, CFS is authorizing its providers to suspend drug testing until April 6, 2020. The Department is reviewing case-specific court orders and we will contact the specific providers directly to collaborate on case-specific plans to ensure compliance with the court orders.

The current pause in testing grants all of us an opportunity to consider alternative plans for conducting drug tests beginning April 6<sup>th</sup>. The Department looks forward to collaborating with you as we all research options that may be available.

**Q: What steps should providers take if a family needs more data or resources for telephonic and virtual visits? Should a provider initially have them reach out to their CFSS, or should the provider take care of it and submit a bill to the Department?**

A CFSS will reach out to families and determine what the family needs in order to participate in services. CFSS can authorize additional minutes or data plans as needed. If the provider chooses to authorize data services, please contact the assigned CFSS.

**Q: Can we still transport children when it comes to medical or counseling appointments if we still conduct the screening questions?**

Yes. If transportation for a medical appointment is needed, the Division recommends using the COVID-19 screening questions. Providers should use appropriate precautions to ensure health and safety of everyone. When available, please use telehealth for medical or behavioral health appointments.

**Q: The Division may have indicated that Intensive Family Preservation will not be referred to for 2 weeks if it's not a safety-related service. Can you clarify what was meant by this? In addition, what about cases that are non-court involved or neglect based on education or sanitary living conditions? Alternative response cases? Do these require face-to-face meetings or are video/telephonic sessions sufficient?**

Since current referrals occur via a face-to-face handoff, the Division is not making referrals until April 6. CFS is working on guidance for providers to conduct virtual referrals. More information is forthcoming.

**Q: Regarding fingerprints, staff is required to be in the home to fingerprint new kinship/relative homes. What guidance can the Division provide to contractors during this emergency declaration?**

Currently CFS policy states caregivers shall be fingerprinted within 7 calendar days after placement. All other background checks are to be completed prior to placement to ensure that there are no concerns based on the criminal history we have access to. DHHS will allow 30 days for fingerprints to be completed, as the Division understands there may be printing delays.

If fingerprinting has historically been completed at a law enforcement site, the Division will abide by their access requirements at this point.

**Q: During the emergency declaration, has the Division changed guidelines related to home study visits?**

At this time, there have been no changes related to requirements for conducting a home study. If a child is being placed in the home, a walk-through must occur prior to placement. For home studies related to foster care licensing, the Division will work with a provider on a case-by-case basis. The division will also work with providers if they are concerned the 45-day requirement cannot be met.

**Q: Can initial foster care physicals be conducted through telehealth?**

Yes, so long as their healthcare professional provides this type of service.

**March 23, 2020**

**Q: If I am participating in the Social Services for the Aged and Disabled (SSAD) program and am currently authorized to receive bus passes with StarTran or Omaha Metro, can I choose to switch to taxi services?**

Yes, effective immediately, all eligible SSAD transportation recipients who reside in the Lincoln and Omaha area can be authorized for taxi services due to concerns regarding COVID-19. Recipients currently authorized to receive bus passes with StarTran or Omaha Metro may choose to switch to taxi services. Please call the ACCESSNebraska Customer Service Center at (800) 383-4278.

**Q: Has the Division provided any guidance for visitations and travel for child welfare providers?**

Yes, CFS has provided child welfare providers guidance for a temporary shift from face-to-face contacts to contacts via video when considered safe to do so. This decision was made in consultation with federal and local court partners in an effort to limiting the spread of COVID-19, maintaining a healthy workforce, and ensuring parents and children are provided the opportunity for social interaction. The guidance document and supplementary information can be found [here](#).



**March 19, 2020**

## Will loss of income due to COVID-19 be considered an extenuating circumstance for households requesting Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) crisis assistance?

Due to the impact of COVID-19, there may be an increase in the number of households requesting LIHEAP crisis assistance. Eligibility requirements for crisis assistance will remain the same. However, per the discretion afforded through Title 476 NAC 2-004.01A, the Department may consider the inability to pay home energy costs as a result of the impact of COVID-19 as an extenuating circumstance.

## Can I use my SNAP EBT card for home delivery services for groceries?

Starting April 1<sup>st</sup> SNAP recipients will be able to use SNAP benefits at qualifying retailers. Right now, only Walmart and Amazon are qualified to accept payments from EBT cards. The rollout of this program is on-going. You can find more information [here](#).

## What requirements will the SNAP program waive during COVID-19?

If a client reports a layoff or if they have applied for unemployment due to the impact of COVID-19, they are considered to have good cause for not meeting the SNAP work requirements and may be considered temporarily exempt.

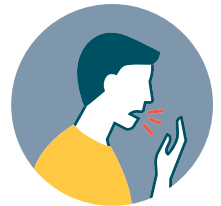
## Has The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) made any program adjustments due to COVID-19?

Yes, the income limit has increased to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level; Nebraska residency requirements have been waived; and verbal attestation will be used instead of requiring forms to be signed. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is available through the [Food Bank for the Heartland](#) and the [Food Bank of Lincoln](#). Both have plans to distribute TEFAP foods through their mobile pantries.

## What do I do if I am a foster parent and have identified someone to provide child care for a child placed in my home (for example a neighbor or family friend)?

Contact your Child and Family Services Specialist (CFSS) with the individual's name and provider ID if they are currently a child care subsidy provider. If the individual is not currently a child care subsidy provider, contact your Child and Family Services Specialist (CFSS) with the individual's name, address, telephone and social security number. The CFSS will send this information to [DHHS.CFSETChildcare@nebraska.gov](mailto:DHHS.CFSETChildcare@nebraska.gov) and provide the date that the child care started with the requested provider. This includes children through their 13th birthday and children with special needs through their 19th birthday. If a child does have special needs and needs special needs care, a [CC-6 form](#) is needed if we do not already have one on file within the past 12 months.

*Please note: if you are a foster parent and do not have an active child subsidy case, you also must complete the application process ([CC-25 form](#)) and there must be a need for service for both foster parents, which is defined on the [CC-25 form](#).*





**March 17, 2020**

## **Licensing:**

Contact the licensure department for waivers at (402) 471-9152. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is waiting for additional federal guidance.

### **If there is a child care and/or school closure, what do I do?**

Use your natural supports and work with your employer to explore opportunities for a flexible schedule, use of paid leave, extended leave, and teleworking options that may be available.

### **If there is a plausible exposure (close contact) and/or positive COVID-19 test result(s) and I am a child care provider or staff member, what steps should I take?**

Please instruct your staff to immediately notify their local health department to determine needed actions. For Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) requirements and guidelines, please visit their website for additional guidance on how to monitor yourself and keep others around you healthy. Those who were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19 should self-quarantine immediately and monitor any symptoms that arise.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html>

### **If there is a plausible exposure (close contact) and or COVID-19 positive test result(s) and I am a licensed foster parent, what steps do I take?**

If you are licensed and supported by the Division of Children and Family Services (CFS), please contact your licensing contact and notify your local health department to determine needed actions. If you are licensed and supported by a local child-placing agency, please notify your placement contact and your local health department to determine needed actions. For Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) requirements and guidelines, please visit their website for additional guidance on how to monitor yourself and keep others around you healthy.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html>

### **If there is a plausible exposure (close contact) and or positive COVID-19 test result(s) and I am a group home staff member, what steps do I take?**

Please notify your employer and also notify your local health department to determine needed actions. For Centers for Disease Control (CDC) requirements and guidelines, please visit their website for additional guidance on how to monitor yourself and keep others around you healthy.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html>

### **What do I do if I am a licensed foster parent and need respite care for a child placed in my home?**

We recognize that there are limited resources for respite care, which may decrease further due to COVID-19. Approved respite providers are able to offer care in your home. Please contact your licensor if you have identified someone new to provide respite care in your home.

## Can virtual services through tele-intervention be offered to families who typically have in-person services? Can this switch happen temporarily without notification to CFS in order to avoid disruption of service?

Prior to providing services in the home or community, we suggest that you call ahead and ask each family screening questions directed at limiting the spread of illness. Consider the following questions for the family:

- Is anyone in the household is currently sick (fever over 100.4, cough, trouble breathing, sore throat, etc.)?
- Has anyone in the household has been in close contact with anyone known to have COVID-19 or are under evaluation for COVID-19?
- Has anyone in the household traveled in the last 14 days recently to a high-risk area for COVID-19 (including any international travel or travel to US communities with community transmission)?
- Does anyone in the family has an underlying health condition?

If the family responds yes to any of the screening questions, there are services that may be delivered to children and families via tele-intervention. You may offer tele-intervention to families who typically have in-person services that are funded by CFS. Please refer to the Division of Medicaid and Long Term Care (MLTC) for guidance on services that are funded through Medicaid at <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/medicaid-and-long-term-care.aspx>. Refer to the Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) for guidance on services that are funded through DBH at [www.dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Behavioral-Health.aspx](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Behavioral-Health.aspx).

It is not necessary to notify CFS when the decision is made and the virtual services can be done for 7 consecutive days before notification to CFS is needed. Following 7 days of tele-intervention services please notify CFS and discuss the potential of continued need. For families who have been possibly exposed to COVID-19, tele-intervention may be the best way to ensure the safety of children and limit exposure to at-risk groups and staff. Please document the reason services were delivered in an alternative manner.

### Parent-Child Visitation:

When children are in out-of-home placements, it is important to maintain connections with their birth families. Family visitation should continue when possible. Providers and CFS staff should conduct a simple assessment prior to making home visits or having visits take place in DHHS offices. In the assessment, staff should ask:

- Is anyone in the household currently sick (fever over 100.4, cough, trouble breathing, sore throat, etc.)?
- Has anyone in the household been in close contact with anyone known to have COVID-19 or are under evaluation for COVID-19?
- Has anyone in the household traveled in the last 14 days recently to a high-risk area for COVID-19 (including any international travel or travel to US communities with community transmission)?
- Does anyone in the family have an underlying health condition?

Staff will then work with their supervisors to determine appropriateness of visits based on these responses, the current county health department recommendations, and case specific circumstances. If a recommendation is made that visitation not occur, the CFSS and Service Area Administrator should be notified immediately and the court made aware of the recommendation.





## Background Checks:

**Could we temporarily be allowed to have direct care staff work with youth if they are not left alone and the staff members have passed the local background checks and central registry checks, in the case of national background checks not being returned in a timely fashion?**

We are working with our state partners to develop a plan to prioritize child caring staff and youth workers for national background checks. If you have an urgent request, you may provide a written plan to CFS which outlines your proposal. This plan should include:

1. Staff-to-client ratio during periods of care.
2. Determination whether inclusion of these staff would allow you to ensure safe and appropriate supervision of youth.
3. Assurances that the staff will not be left alone with youth and details as to how this will be managed.

## Staffing Ratios:

**What is the process for notification of inability to meet the current required staffing ratios in congregate care based on licensing standards if a waiver does not exist?**

CFS will hold, at a minimum, a weekly statewide call with contracted providers to ensure that Nebraska's child welfare system is able to provide the supports necessary to ensure the safety of children in our care. Together we will collaborate, strategize, and share resources to ensure an ability to meet the needs of children and families in our care. Should you have an urgent need, please contact us immediately.

## Child Care:

**Where can I find a list of child care providers?**

A list of child care providers is available at <http://dhhs.ne.gov/pages/child-care-parents.aspx>.

**How do I apply for a child care subsidy?**

Applications are available online at [ACCESSNebraska.ne.gov](http://ACCESSNebraska.ne.gov) or apply by telephone via the Customer Service Center (800) 383-4278.

**How can I become a child care subsidy provider?**

Information is available at <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Child-Care-Providers.aspx> or contact Child Care Subsidy at (402) 471-9152.

**Can I provide child care for a child that is quarantined?**

Yes, if the child and their siblings are the only children under the care of the provider. The quarantined child should be isolated from the others. Child care cannot be provided for other children from different households if you are caring for a quarantined child.



## Has Child Care Resource Development made any operational changes due to COVID-19?

Resource Development will contact providers by telephone to receive a health update before coming out to make a visit. If the provider is not open, the visit will be delayed until the provider is well. Information can be obtained via telephone and use of Skype.

## Aged and Disabled Services:

### What if I do not want to ride the bus?

Contact the ACCESSNebraska Customer Service Center to discuss transportation needs for non-medical services. Contact your managed care organization (Nebraska Total Care, Well Care, or UnitedHealthcare Community Plan for Nebraska) for medical transportation.

### What if my provider is quarantined?

Consider utilizing friends and neighbors for assistance. Contact the ACCESSNebraska Customer Service Center to see if other providers are available.

## DHHS Economic Assistance Programs:

### What does the emergency declaration mean for DHHS programs?

The emergency declaration allows Nebraska to apply for regulation waivers to enable the program to operate during times of emergency. The Children and Family Services policy staff is currently considering waivers to help Nebraskans and will be submitting requests shortly.

### Can the Department make process changes to assist during this?

Yes. Employment First and SNAP Next Step can grant medical exemptions from participation to those who are ill or quarantined related to COVID-19. Employment plans can be updated to allow flexibility for those needing to conduct school and job search activities online or from alternate locations. Eligibility and contract staff will provide assistance and extra time to obtain verification of income, participation, expenses, and assets.

### Are there any changes to SNAP EBT?

No operational changes have been enacted at this time. EBT cards are mailed or can be obtained in a local office if it is the initial card. Replacement EBT cards are mailed.

### How long does it take for eligibility decision?

Eligibility is determined as soon as all required information is completed which includes: application, interview if required, and verification of information. Many times the application is approved the same day an application is received. In February, Nebraska averaged 13 days for Economic Assistance and Medicaid eligibility.

### How does someone apply for economic assistance?

Applications are available at [ACCESSNebraska.ne.gov](https://ACCESSNebraska.ne.gov) or by calling the Customer Service Center at (800) 383-4278. Local offices also offer in-person services.



## What federal waivers will the Department submit in response to the emergency declaration?

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services will submit waivers, as appropriate, to help mitigate the financial impact COVID-19 will have on vulnerable individuals, low-income families, and our valuable community providers. The Department will post its request for federal waivers when submitted to our federal partners.

## Other Information:

### Resources for Community Partners:

A strong community response is essential to successfully meeting the challenges of COVID-19. For more information regarding community partners please visit:

<https://www.nebraskachildren.org/covid-19-information-and-resources.html>.

The Nebraska Family Helpline is available 24/7 to parents and families. Any problem, any time: (888) 866-8660. The Nebraska Network of Care is a web-based resource that promotes wellness, recovery and resilience through libraries of information, lists of services and supports, and other helpful tools.

<https://portal.networkofcare.org/Sites/Nebraska?state=nebraska>

### Food Distribution Programs:

The Department's Food Distribution Program is working with local schools and food banks to insure there are no disruptions in service. The Division is working with federal and state partners to make sure children can access a nutritious food program at school or through sites typically utilized through summer lunch programs. Contact your school, local food pantry or Community Action Program at <https://canhelp.org/> for local information.

*This page is intended to be continuously updated as resources become known or available. It contains policy changes, opportunities for communities, and general updates connected to the local and national response to COVID-19.*