

Children and Family Services COVID-19 Guidance

3/23/2022

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Division of Children and Family Services (CFS) is committed to supporting the children, families and vulnerable adults in our communities, and keeping our workforce safe and healthy. Protection and Safety within CFS and our partner providers (providers include agencies providing services to children and families, as well as foster parents and agencies that license and provide support to foster parents) are essential to maintaining community services for some of our most vulnerable individuals and families who are struggling to safely care for their children. It is our goal, whenever possible, to have face-to-face contact with children and families while practicing safe hygiene and social distancing in order to continue to protect our workforce and providers while keeping children, families, and vulnerable adults safe.

As we continue to meet the needs of the pandemic, we wanted to ensure that updated guidance is made available to staff, providers, and families.

Field Contacts (DHHS and Providers)

At this time, the expectation Children and Family Services Specialists (CFSS) and child welfare providers to conduct face-to-face visits when safe for all initial and follow-up contacts, parent/sibling visitation, home studies, etc. There are still COVID positive cases within our communities, as such, there will be some exceptions which may occur based on family's circumstances for contacts to be completed virtually.

Court Hearings


Please follow court guidance provided by the Supreme Court and your local Court jurisdiction.

Positive COVID-19 Tests

If a child in DHHS custody tests positive for COVID-19, the CFSS will communicate this positive test result to the parents, whose parental rights are still intact, as well as the foster parents or placement if the child is placed out of home. Positive test results will only be shared with case participants on a need-to-know basis. This may include the following: child's guardian ad litem (GAL), appointed CASA, assigned juvenile court judge, foster parents, service providers, and probation officer for children who are dually adjudicated. Positive test results of children will first be shared with parents and in-person when possible or using secure email, via phone, video conferencing or in person when possible.

If a **parent** tests positive for COVID-19 and it is an out-of-home case, the CFSS will encourage the parent to communicate this information with their child(ren) and the foster care placement so necessary precautions can be taken.





If a **foster parent/household member** tests positive for COVID-19, the CFSS will encourage the foster parent to speak with any foster children in their house, the foster children's parents, the foster parent's foster placing agency, as well as any service providers that are providing face-to-face services or in home services to that foster home.

In situations where a family member, child, or household member has a confirmed case of COVID-19 and this is known by the CFSS or service provider, the family team may explore alternatives to having any face to face contact. If a service provider tests positive for COVID-19, the provider and their agency should follow CDC guidelines on the need to quarantine isolate; however, the family team will work with the provider agency to obtain a different service provider staff or will discuss the option for a virtual visit if agreed upon by the family team to ensure there is no delay in services being provided timely. If a service provider does not have other staff available, the CFS staff should make a referral to another agency able to conduct supervised parenting time.

Vaccinations

Child Welfare Professionals: Although the state has not mandated vaccination for any employee, we continue to encourage personal responsibility and continue to educate all Nebraskans about the safety and importance of the vaccine and mitigation strategies. We continue to strongly urge unvaccinated people to get vaccinated and if they have questions to have conversations with their doctor or qualified medical provider; teammates were offered on-site vaccination as the state began its wide scale vaccination distribution efforts.

While masks are not mandated, they are strongly encouraged, especially for those with direct client contact.

There have been times when circumstances dictated the need for masking with the families we serve, community organizations, and provider agencies, and we will work to ensure CFS teammates comply with these requests as they arise. However, DHHS staff are not required to show proof of vaccination.


Our first priority is to always ensure the children and families of Nebraska are safe.

Can children be vaccinated? COVID-19 vaccines have only been approved for use in certain population. The Pfizer vaccine is authorized for those 5 and older; the Moderna vaccine for those 18 and older; the J&J vaccine for those 18 and older. Children's immune systems are different from adults so more research is needed to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are safe for them. Vaccines for younger children and infants will take more time to develop. Teens ages 12 to 17 years old should receive the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 booster shot at least 5 months after completing their Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 primary series. Currently, a booster shot is not recommended for children younger than 12 years old.

Children in State's Care: Child welfare professional may seek the administration of a vaccine to a youth who is in out-of-home care or permanently committed to the Department in compliance with the process outlined below when the following conditions have all been met:

1. The FDA has issued a EUA for the specific vaccine to be administered for the youth's age.
2. The youth has been assessed to ensure there are no known medical conditions that would result in an adverse reaction to the vaccine.
3. The youth meets the population requirements as outlined by the Department of Health and Human Services. COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ's can be found at: <https://dhhs.ne.gov/Documents/COVID-19-VRAS-FAQ.pdf>
4. The youth requests to the administration of the vaccine. If the youth is not of sufficient majority to consent, the legal custodian may consent to the administration but only as provided below and consistent with Nebraska law.

If a youth meets the above conditions and has been **committed to the custody of the Department** and there are no parental rights intact, the caseworker or contracted service provider (Eastern Service Area) may provide consent for the administration of the vaccine consistent with Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-285. The child welfare professional responsible for the case shall provide documentation of the consent for the vaccine and shall document the consent and administration of the vaccine in NFOCUS.



If a youth meets the above conditions and the **youth is placed in an adoptive home pending adoption**, the prospective adoptive parents should be part of the conversation regarding the vaccine. If the determination is made for the youth to receive the vaccine the child welfare professional responsible for the case shall provide documentation of the consent for the vaccine and shall document the consent and administration of the vaccine in NFOCUS. If the adoptive parents do not wish for the child to be vaccinated, then the child welfare professional will inform legal parties and if there are concerns from the legal parties, then a request can be made for the court to make a best interest determination.

If a youth meets the above conditions and the **youth's parents' rights have not been terminated**, the child welfare professional shall obtain the parent's express and informed consent. The child welfare professional responsible for the case shall provide documentation of the parent's written consent for the vaccine to the medical professional and shall document the consent and administration of the vaccine in NFOCUS. If a parent of the youth is unavailable, cannot be located, or does not consent to the vaccination, the child welfare professional shall notify the court and legal parties in writing and request a legal staffing to determine whether the Department wants to file a motion asking the court to make a best interest determination.

Personal Measures

- Put 6 feet of distance (about 2 arms' length) between yourself and people who don't live in your household.
- Wear a cloth face covering wearing in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.)
- Stay home if you are sick and avoid contact with sick people.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Helpful Links

- CDC EUA information: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/eua/index.html>
- DHHS COVID-19 site: <https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>
- DHHS Immunization Program: <https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Immunization.aspx>
- Local Health Department Locations: <https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Local-Health-Departments.aspx>
- COVID-19 Nebraska Guidance Documents:
<https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/COVID-19-Nebraska-Guidance-Documents.aspx>