

## **FOSTER CARE LICENSING GUIDELINES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

April 16, 2021

The following guidance is based on the most current Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) guidance. The health and safety of children, family, case workers, and foster parents are of the utmost importance. This guidance is not intended to address every potential scenario that may arise as this event evolves. It is critical that providers continue in-person contact where feasible, knowing that there may be future times when flexibility for virtual meeting is necessary.

DHS continues to monitor the form and intensity of RRTS services, particularly as it pertains to in-home services. Home visitation and in-person visits with foster families is an essential aspect of providing quality services and DHS is committed to support RRTS in their role in order to protect staff and clients. We believe it is necessary to have a communication infrastructure, including guidance such as is included in this document, which is responsive to changing public health conditions.

In-person contacts during the provision of foster care licensing and monthly contacts will resume April 23, 2021. This will include:

- ▶ Monthly contact with licensed foster parents.
- ▶ Required visit with applicants completing the home study process.
- ▶ Five day post placement visits.
- ▶ Unannounced licensing visits.

### **MITIGATION PRACTICES MUST CONTINUE FOR ALL INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES REQUIRING IN-PERSON CONTACT WITH FOSTER FAMILIES/APPLICANTS**

- ▶ Implement common-sense practices for preventing disease spread, such as covering a cough, staying home when sick, and washing hands. The CDC recommends washing hands for at least 20 seconds.
- ▶ Wearing a face mask/cloth covering is expected for anyone over the age of 2 years.
- ▶ Call in advance of conducting home visits or other in-person meetings.
- ▶ During in-person meetings, do not sit within 6 feet of anyone in the home.
- ▶ Avoid handling paperwork during the meeting.
- ▶ Avoid touching your face or hair during the meeting.
- ▶ Wash hands for at least 20 seconds with warm, soapy water or hand sanitizer before and after the meeting.

### **CONTAINMENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

When preparing or scheduling appointments for face-to-face visits, be sure to ask all adult subjects and household members the following questions:

- ▶ Fever or chills
- ▶ Cough
- ▶ Diarrhea
- ▶ Fatigue
- ▶ Muscle or body aches
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- ▶ New loss of taste or smell
- ▶ Sore throat
- ▶ Congestion or runny nose
- ▶ Nausea or vomiting

Have you had contact with anyone who has known or possible exposure to the COVID-19 in the last 14 days?

Are you on home quarantine or isolation due to possible contact with someone with possible or confirmed COVID-19?

RRTS contractors should also answer the screening questions for themselves prior to meeting with a foster family/applicant. If any of the answers are 'yes', the contractor should not conduct the home visit. If foster parents/applicants answer 'no' during the pre-screening questions, then proceed with the in-person contact. Face masks are recommended to be worn at all times.

Circumstances in which virtual meetings are deemed more appropriate and safe may include one or more of the following:

- ▶ Any individual residing the foster home answer yes to any of the COVID-19 screening questions.
- ▶ RRTS caseworker is quarantined due to COVID-19 or waiting for test results.
- ▶ Members of household request no in-person contact due to safety or high risk in household.
- ▶ RRTS caseworker is unable to wear a mask due to health conditions.

The use of video conferencing will meet contract requirements if delivered in accordance with this guidance. Secure video conferencing methods should be employed. The reason for the virtual contact should be documented in the case note in each foster homes licensing file, when applicable. In-person services will resume as soon as safely possible.

## **FOSTER PARENT TRAINING**

TIPS-MAPP pre-service trainings currently in session will complete the class through video-conferencing. TIPS-MAPP pre-service training will begin to transition from video-conferencing to in-person training. Other approved foster parent trainings can occur in-person or through video-conferencing. The transition will begin 4/16/21 and be completed by 5/31/21. If a venue cannot be located by 5/31/21, contractors will contact the Foster Care Program Manager for an exception.

In-person trainings will be held with the following expectations:

- ▶ Social distancing through increased spacing is encouraged as well as limited mixing during class.
- ▶ Face masks are recommended to be worn at all times.
- ▶ The room should be equipped with hand sanitizer.
- ▶ No one should sit within 6 feet from one another in the room.
- ▶ Facilitators will follow CDC disinfecting guidelines for all training locations.

## GENERAL RESOURCES

The situation related to COVID-19 is changing rapidly. Visit the websites below for up-to-date information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Iowa Department of Public Health:

<https://idph.iowa.gov/Emerging-Health-Issues/Novel-Coronavirus>

COVID-19 DHS Resources:

<https://dhs.iowa.gov/COVID19>

Children's Bureau Guidance:

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/covid-worker-safety>

The information outlined in this document is further subject to change due to the rapidly evolving situation related to COVID-19. This guidance remains in place until further notice.

## QUESTIONS

For questions about this guidance, please contact Nancy Swanson, Foster Care Program Manager at [nswanso@dhs.state.ia.us](mailto:nswanso@dhs.state.ia.us).

