

Question: How can I explain current events to the children in my home and support them during this difficult time?

Answer: Caregivers should ensure they are sharing accurate information about the coronavirus and COVID-19 with the children and youth in their home. With the variety of information sources available, some children and youth, especially those with access to social media, may see or hear inaccurate information being disseminated. Families are encouraged to check reliable sources, such as the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the [World Health Organization](#), and [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#).

The amount of information a child can understand and process about the coronavirus will vary based on the child's age and development. In general, follow the child's lead; some children may want to spend time talking, while others may not seem interested or have a lot of questions. *Kids Health from Nemours* offers some general guidelines on [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): How to Talk to Your Child](#).

As always, if you have concerns about the mental health and well-being of a child in your home, you should contact the child's therapist or inquire with the child's caseworker about a referral for mental health services.

Question: What resources are available to assist me in supporting the teenagers in my home?

Answer: Older youth may struggle with being isolated from their friends and family. Older youth and young adults oftentimes feel a sense of invincibility and may have difficulty understanding the importance of adhering to social distancing guidelines. *The Child Mind Institute* has helpful tips for [Supporting Teenagers and Young Adults During the Coronavirus Crisis](#). *UNICEF* has tips for [How Teenagers Can Protect Their Mental Health During Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). *Youth Law Center* has made a recorded webinar available to families on [The Power of Connection: How Resource Families Can Support Adolescents Through the COVID-19 Crisis](#).

Question: How are court proceedings being impacted? Will our next scheduled hearing still occur? Are virtual hearings being conducted? Can children still be removed, reunified, and adopted during the Stay Home order?

Answer: Many courts have interim procedures for holding court hearings and managing their court dockets. Communications regarding court changes can be found on the [Michigan Courts website](#). Michigan Supreme Court Administrative Order 2020-2 has deemed Permanency Planning Hearings and 24-hour Preliminary and Emergency Removal Hearings as essential functions of the court during this time. As such, courts may continue to hold these hearings. Local courts are determining which hearings can be held virtually using videoconferencing or telephone participation. For information on how your hearings may be affected, contact your caseworker, the child's lawyer-guardian ad litem (L-GAL), or the court.

Question: Has there been any change in the number of children entering foster care during the pandemic and Stay Home Stay Safe order?

Answer: Fewer children have been entering foster care since the closure of schools and subsequent Stay Home Stay Safe order. Unfortunately, fewer children have exited foster care to permanency during this time.

Question: Will disruptions in court-ordered services for parents, such as substance screens, impact court decisions such as removal or reunification?

Answer: Potential impacts of disruption in court-ordered services depend on individual case circumstances. The assigned caseworker should be able to talk through how they will be reporting to court about compliance both prior to, during, and after the Stay Home Stay Safe order.

Question: If my child's case closes administratively (without a hearing), who can I contact about arranging for services?

Answer: Adoptive parents and guardians whose child(ren)'s cases have recently closed should contact the child(ren)'s previous worker or the supervisor for assistance. In addition, the Post Adoption Resource Centers (PARC) provide services to adoptive families and guardians throughout the state. A map and contact information for each PARC location can be found on the following [MDHHS website](#).

Question: When will visits with parents resume? Will there be precautions in place?

Answer: MDHHS will resume in person visits at the earliest point possible and will reconsider this important matter at the end of April. This decision will depend on the status of the Governor's Stay Home Stay Safe Executive Order.

Question: The child I am caring for is struggling with being unable to visit their parents and/or siblings in person. What can I do in the meantime to support their well-being?

Answer: Many children in foster care are struggling with changes in their visitation plans. Generally, caregivers are encouraged to allow frequent and regular contact between children placed in their home and the children's parents, siblings, and other people with whom the child has a significant bond through phone calls, videoconferencing options such as Skype, FaceTime, or Zoom, text messages, and emails.

Exceptions to the suspension of face to face parenting time/sibling visits may be considered if there is risk of severe psychological harm to the child. If you believe an exception should be considered for a child placed in your home, contact the child's caseworker to discuss whether an exception request should be submitted to MDHHS leadership.

Question: Is video visitation, like using Skype or FaceTime, beneficial for babies, toddlers, and preschool-aged children?

Answer: While in-person visitation is the best way to support families, it isn't always possible during this emergency. The Youth Law Center's Quality Parenting Initiative recently released a resource series called "COVID-19: The New Normal" to support parents, including birth parents, foster and adoptive parents, and kinship caregivers. The resource series includes a recorded webinar on [Using Media Effectively with Young Children and Virtual Visitation](#), which includes tips for maximizing the benefit of video visitation for very young children from 6 months through 5 years of age.

Question: Do children need to attend well-child doctor visits during the Stay Home Stay Safe order if there are no health concerns? What if they were scheduled for routine immunizations?

Answer: Across the state, health providers are limiting care to persons with emergency health needs. Required well-child medical exams and dental exams are not readily available. The MDHHS Medical

Services Administration (MSA) is providing guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to propose solutions for social distancing to slow the spread of COVID-19 and thus preserve the health system capacity for the duration of the pandemic. Minimizing face-to-face contact whenever possible is strongly encouraged. MDHHS recognizes it is not possible for children to attend well-child visits or receive routine immunizations during the Stay Home Stay Safe order. Many doctors are conducting medical appointments, including well-child visits, using telehealth services. Some appointments may be rescheduled depending on the individual child's needs. Caregivers with specific concerns about the health or medical needs of children in their care should contact the child(ren)'s physician and caseworker.

Question: Will family team meetings (FTMs) continue to be held during the pandemic? Will there be mandatory FTMs to "catch up" team members after the Stay Home Stay Safe order is lifted?

Answer: Yes, virtual FTMs should be occurring. FTMs will be important after the Stay Home Stay Safe order is lifted to address important case plans and decisions.

Question: Will caregivers receive points on a child's Determination of Care (DOC) assessment for providing educational support due to school closures? What about caregivers who must take additional precautions to care for a child who is at higher risk for complications if they were to become ill with COVID-19?

Answer: Caseworkers have been instructed to complete a DOC re-assessment if caregiver activities have increased. As an example, distance learning plans enacted by local school districts may cause caregiver education activities to increase. As such, a DOC re-assessment may increase scoring and DOC levels. Caseworkers have also been instructed that they should not reduce the DOC level based on temporary restrictions in caregiver activities due to COVID-19.

Question: I was in the process of obtaining my foster home license prior to the pandemic. Once I am licensed, will I still be able to take placements during the pandemic?

Answer: Yes. Placements continue to be needed, even during the pandemic. Thank you for working towards becoming a foster parent.

Question: How long will it take for my license to be issued once my home study is sent to the Division of Child Welfare Licensing (DCWL)?

Answer: DCWL is reviewing and issuing new licenses for recommendations received within approximately 14 days. Families who have questions about their pending license should contact their licensing worker or the DCWL mailbox: MDHHS-DCWL-TA@michigan.gov.

Question: Is every placement being treated as COVID-19 positive?

Answer: No; however, caseworkers must diligently screen all children and families at the time of placement and replacement to determine the appropriate precautions that need to be taken.

Question: Will foster parents receive personal protection equipment (PPE) and supplies?

Answer: PPE is limited across the state and is typically prioritized for hospital staff. There are currently no plans to supply PPE to caregivers. Caregivers who have a unique need should contact their caseworker.

Question: What placement and/or respite options exist for a child in foster care if his/her caregiver(s) become ill with COVID-19 and are unable to provide care?

Answer: Court-ordered placement of children and unavoidable replacement of children under the care and supervision of MDHHS is considered essential to sustain and protect life and must continue as determined necessary during the health crisis.

Caregivers who become unable to provide care to children placed in their home should contact the child's caseworker for further guidance.

Prior to each placement or replacement of a child into a family home setting, caseworkers must inform caregivers of the child's health status. Utilizing allowable alternatives to face-to-face contact, caseworkers should ask the following screening questions of all household members in the child's current home or placement and the child's prospective home/placement(s):

1. Is there any reason you have been instructed to self-quarantine or isolate? If yes, why?
2. Have you had contact with any Persons Under Investigation (PUIs) for COVID-19 within the last 14 days, or with anyone confirmed to have COVID-19?
3. Do you have any symptoms of a respiratory infection (e.g., cough, fever, or shortness of breath)?

In cases where placement must occur and someone in the child's current household has COVID-19 or symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath), caseworkers must inform the prospective placement. If the child has symptoms at the time of placement or subsequently develops symptoms, the child's caregiver should contact the child's physician. If anyone in the child's current or prospective home reports symptoms, the individual should contact their health care provider.

Respite plans should be suspended until the Stay Home Stay Safe order is lifted, unless the respite care is necessary in response to an immediate health or safety concern or to preserve a child's placement that is at risk of disruption.

Question: If I am willing to provide care for more children than what my license currently allows, can I still get a variance or placement exception during the Stay Home Stay Safe order?

Answer: Beginning Tuesday, March 31, 2020, licensing workers were instructed to contact each of their licensed foster parents by telephone and verbally administer a survey to assess current and potential future foster home capacity. If a foster parent indicated a willingness to increase their home capacity and doing so would necessitate a change to terms or capacity, licensing workers were instructed to send those requests to the Division of Child Welfare Licensing (DCWL) via email. DCWL continues to review Placement Exception Requests and licensing variances during the Stay Home Stay Safe order. Caregivers with additional questions can contact their licensing worker or the DCWL mailbox: MDHHS-DCWL-TA@michigan.gov.

Question: Is there anything extra that we as families can do beyond adhering to social distancing measures? I would love to help children who need to be moved from one home to another.

Answer: Caregivers with an interest in providing support to children in foster care or caregivers in their area are encouraged to contact their child(ren)'s caseworker, or the caseworker's supervisor, to inquire about needs and opportunities available.

Question: I'm an essential worker who must still use daycare for the children in my home when I report to work. I am having trouble reaching anyone about my foster child's MDHHS daycare benefits.

Who can I contact for help if I cannot reach the eligibility specialist so that our daycare services are not disrupted?

Answer: Caregivers who are unable to reach their eligibility specialist by phone or email for assistance related to a child placed in their home can contact the child's caseworker for further assistance. More information regarding childcare payments can also be directed to the Child Development and Care Center at 1-866-990-3227 or on their [website](#).

Question: With schools closed for the rest of the 2019-2020 school year, are there plans in place to assist caregivers who have older youth who are unable to attend daycare once the Stay Home Stay Safe order is lifted and caregivers may have to return to work outside of their homes?

Answer: There are currently no specific plans in place. MDHHS will continue to assess this need.

Question: Is there additional financial support available for caregivers who are incurring extra expenses, such as having to sign up for or upgrade internet services so that children can participate in virtual learning, or experiencing a decrease in income due to the pandemic?

Answer: While additional financial support for internet service is not currently being provided to foster parents and relative caregivers by MDHHS, many internet providers are offering free internet access to new customers and/or low-income households. Families should contact the internet service providers available in their area to inquire about available services.

Information about housing and mortgage relief, mental health resources, and other statewide financial resources can also be found [here](#).

Question: Will those who qualify for the federal stimulus funds receive \$500 for each foster child placed in their home?

Answer: Stimulus payments will be based on children claimed on an individual or couple's 2019 taxes. For those who have not yet filed your 2019 taxes, payment will be based on 2018 taxes. Specific questions related to taxes, tax refunds, and stimulus payments should be directed to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or your tax preparer. Additional information, including how to get your stimulus check if you do not currently have a bank account, have moved since filing your taxes, or receive Social Security benefits, can also be found [here](#). This may result in situations where a foster parent receives funds for a child no longer placed with them or a foster parent has a placement but does not receive funds for them. This is being handled at the federal level and therefore we do not have much control or influence on the process.

Question: Are there additional food resources available for caregivers with children who were previously receiving free- or reduced-cost meals through Head Start, the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), or their schools?

Answer: All children in foster care are eligible for free- or reduced-cost lunch when attending school for grades K-12. If a child was enrolled in school prior to the Stay Home Stay Safe order and was enrolled in the free/reduced lunch program, the current caregiver will get a preloaded electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card. Families who were already receiving food assistance will see those funds added to their current Bridge card. School districts throughout the state have set up food distribution sites. Children under age 5 who were not enrolled in school or were attending Head Start or GSRP may be able to receive free breakfast and lunch through their local school district. For information about local food banks, dial 211.

Question: What other resources are available to support youth and families during the coronavirus outbreak?

Answer: In addition to the resources referenced above, families may want to explore the resources listed below.

MDHHS has posted several COVID-19 resources on the [MDHHS Foster Care Forms and Publications](#) public website, including [COVID-19 Resources and Tips for Parents and Caregivers](#), letters for parents and foster parents and guidance issued to child welfare staff.

[Resources to Support Youth and Families During the Coronavirus COVID-19 Outbreak](#) developed by *Youth.gov* has a list of information and resources regarding childcare, education, employment/unemployment insurance, finances, food and nutrition, and mental health.

The *National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)* has published a [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease 2019](#).

Common Sense Media has a list of [Resources for Families During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#), including educational resources and homework help, family-friendly entertainment resources, and tips for helping kids and parents understand COVID-19 news coverage.