



In-Person Visits during COVID-19:

Information for Providers and Other Stakeholders:

In March 2020, the Department of Human Services Social Services Administration (DHS/SSA) notified providers and other stakeholders on information pertaining to COVID-19. DHS/SSA stressed the importance of ensuring the safety of the children, youth, families and our dedicated direct service staff and partners across the State of Maryland who continue to provide essential services. DHS/SSA shared that all in-person visit requirements will remain in place (i.e. parent-child visit, sibling visit, and monthly caseworker visit) but these visits may be conducted by videoconferencing and other visual communication tools based on guidance from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Children’s Bureau, and the Maryland Department of Health.

As the State of Maryland has implemented the COVID-19 “Roadmap to Recovery” plan in a manner that ensures the health and safety of all Marylanders, DHS/SSA has also developed a plan to gradually resume in-person visits, effective March 15, 2021. Recognizing the importance of parent-child visitation and sibling visits to preserve bonding, the challenges presented through video and telephone conferencing, and the anxiety around risks currently involved with interpersonal contacts, a plan has been developed to support each jurisdiction that balances these factors with the health and safety of all those participating in in-person visits.

Going forward, in-person parent-child visitation, sibling visits, and monthly caseworker visits will be guided by a protocol that includes:

- Completing pre-screening health questions (Attachment A) prior to the visit,
- Utilizing safety precautions during transportation,
- Sanitizing protocols at visitation centers,
- Conducting of visits outdoors whenever possible, and
- Requiring that adult visit participants wear a face covering during the visits. (Children over the age of two will be encouraged to wear the face covering but are not required to do so.)

Procedures for family visitation are outlined in the Maryland DHS/SSA Visitation Agreement (Attachment B) that visit participants, including parents and his/her attorney, resource parents, older children, and the staff supervising the visit, will be asked to review and discuss prior to resuming in-person visits with their children. Your cooperation and assistance with these new protocols and procedures will help to ensure the health and safety of children, parents, resource parents, and visit staff.

Beginning March 15, 2021, staff will begin to schedule in-person family visitation, sibling visits, and monthly caseworker visits as quickly as possible. Due to jurisdiction environmental readiness and a decreased availability of resources, including visit supervision and transportation, it will not be possible to accommodate in-person visits for every family in the first few days after in-person visits resumes. It is likely that over the next few months family visits will consist of a combination of in-person, videoconferencing/telephone contacts, and other visual communication tools.





Although the requirements for in-person family visits are outlined in the Maryland DHS/SSA Visitation Agreement, listed below are some of the key points: □ Do not attend in-person visits if you:

- Have tested positive or were clinically diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last 14 days;
- Were in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 in the last 14 days; or
- Are displaying *symptoms of COVID-19*. ○ Objective temperature assessment is required for visitation involving medically fragile children or youth. Temperatures must be less than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) in order for in-person visitation to take place.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include:

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

- Please keep in mind that all adults involved in in-person visitation must wear a face covering. Children over the age of two years should be encouraged, but not required, to wear face coverings. We recognize that the requirement to use face coverings during the visit may present challenges, particularly with younger children who do not understand the purpose of the face covering. We have included guidance for parents and resource parents on how to prepare young children to visit with parents who are wearing a face covering.
- Face coverings are mandatory for those visiting medically fragile children and youth.
- During the visit please help to ensure your health and safety and the health and safety of others by:
 - Monitoring for symptoms of COVID-19;
 - Washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer as outlined in the Visitation Agreement;
 - Encouraging children to wash their hands frequently; and ○ Sanitizing toys brought to the visit at the beginning of the visit.

DHS/SSA encourages parents and resource parents to continue regular contact through video conferencing/telephone and other visual communication tools in addition to in-person family visits. It will allow parents and children to have more frequent contact, which many have found beneficial. We appreciate your patience and understanding as DHS/SSA continues to respond to the changing conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic in our state. It is critical that all participants adhere to the guidelines outlined in this letter, as well as those in the Maryland DHS/SSA Visitation Agreement. DHS/SSA is committed to providing services in a manner that ensures the health and safety of parents, children, resource parents, and staff. If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact your caseworker.

