



COVID-19 Response
Date: June 18, 2020

Topic: Guidance for Residential Providers on Visits with Family and Friends

Effective Date: June 21, 2020

Visits with family and friends are important to the well-being of individuals living in provider-managed settings. As COVID-19 cases decrease across New Jersey, limited visits will now be permitted. Please note that this policy will be further adjusted over time as more is learned about the virus. These visits, referred to as Social Distancing Visits, must occur outside of the group home and are subject to the requirements and precautions outlined in this document.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reminds us that indoor spaces are more risky than outdoor spaces for interactions to occur. This is because it might be harder to keep people apart and there is less ventilation¹. For this reason, visitation within the residential setting will not be permitted except in limited circumstances already outlined in the Division's [residential screening policy](#). However, an outdoor visit that does not take place within the residence shall be arranged by the residential provider.

It is important to note that, even with prudent steps being taken to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection, neither the provider nor the Division can guarantee that COVID-19 transmission will not occur. For this reason, the individual, family, guardian and provider should discuss the overall risk a visit poses to the individual's health and how they will react to a Social Distancing Visit. Other important information to consider from the CDC can be found at:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/activities.html

Any visits, referred to as Social Distancing Visits, will have the following requirements:

- Each participant will maintain a distance of at least six feet apart from each person they do not reside with. All efforts to maintain social distancing shall be made by all participants. It is recognized that a resident may not completely understand the concept of social distancing. If a resident does initiate physical contact with someone they do not reside with during the interaction it should be brief.
- Each participant must wear a face covering. Visitors should inquire with the residential provider ahead of the visit if they need to bring their own face covering or if one will be provided to them. The individual under services should be encouraged to wear a face covering. However, it is understood that they may not have the ability to tolerate wearing it and/or it may not be medically advisable for them to do so.

¹ www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/activities.html

- After a visit in a space controlled by the provider concludes, the provider shall clean and disinfect all areas and surfaces that visitors were in contact with, following CDC guidelines².

Criteria for Social Distancing Visits

In all cases, reasonable efforts to provide privacy to those participating in the visit shall be made. All of the following criteria must be met for a visit to be considered:

- No resident, current staff of the home or person(s) planning to visit have tested positive or been symptomatic for COVID-19 within the last 14 days.
- To the best of their knowledge, no resident, current staff of the home or person(s) planning to visit have been in close contact (within six feet for 10 minutes) within the last 14 days with someone who recently tested positive for COVID-19 (i.e. in the past two weeks).
- The individual, family, guardian and provider have discussed the impact a social distancing visit may have on the mental and physical health of the resident and how to best address possible negative outcomes, if any. This shall include information contained in recent CDC guidance found at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/activities.html.

Social Distancing Visits

The Division's [residential screening policy](#), as well as the policy of the residential provider, must be adhered to for any Social Distancing Visits, regardless of where they occur. This includes the screening of participants. The total number of visitors at any one time, duration and frequency of a visit shall be reasonable and based on a number that the provider can support while maintaining overall program operations. As visits in the residential setting are not permitted, the following guidance is provided:

- Organize a visit in an outdoor area with sufficient space and seating to allow individuals who have not been residing together to be at least six feet apart. This could be on the property of the home or in a public setting (such as a park) that is not over-crowded. The location shall be agreed upon by the provider. Outside temperature, weather conditions, availability of restrooms and other facilities should be considered in planning. The residential provider shall provide transportation for the resident.
- If current staff, resident or someone they plan to visit with develops symptoms, has tested positive and/or has knowledge that they have been in close contact (within six feet for 10 minutes) in the last 14 days with someone with active COVID-19 (i.e. has tested positive in the last two weeks), the visit shall not occur.
- Those persons participating in the visit may want to bring item(s) or food for the resident. Any items and packaging for the resident should be disinfected before being provided to the resident. It is recommended that food items be purchased in a sealed package from a grocery store with proper disinfection of the packaging before use. Those disinfecting the item/package must wash their hands after completing.

² www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html

- Consider activities that are appropriate to the needs of the individual and that lend themselves to social distancing. Examples may include word games, charades, bean bag toss, etc. Items should be disinfected after use.
- Advise all participants to monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 for at least 14 days after their visit. If symptoms occur, advise them to self-isolate at home, contact their healthcare provider, and immediately notify the provider of the date they visited. The provider should immediately screen the resident who had contact with the participant, and take all necessary actions based on any findings.

Other Types of Visits

If a family or friend requests a visit that will not be directly supervised by the residential provider, such as an overnight visit to a family member's home or other daytime outing, the residential provider may establish parameters for the individual's re-admission to the residence. This may include not allowing immediate re-admission. The family or friend of the individual seeking this type of visit should contact the residential provider to determine what these parameters may be.

Alternatives to Visits

In lieu of visits, the Department suggests that residential providers consider:

- Offering alternative means of communication for people who would otherwise visit, such as virtual communications (phone, video-communication, etc.).
- Creating/increasing listserv communication to update families, such as advising to not visit.
- Assigning staff as primary contact to families for inbound calls and conduct regular outbound calls to keep families up to date.
- Offering a phone line with a voice recording updated at set times (e.g., daily) with the residence's general operating status, such as when it is safe to resume visits.