



In-Person Visits during COVID-19: Information for Parents

We know these have been stressful and challenging times and appreciate everything you are doing to stay connected and supportive of your child(ren). As the state begins to open up, The Department of Human Services Social Services Administration (DHS/SSA) is committed to moving back to in person visits. We are committed to working with you to resume in-person visits in a manner that takes into account the health and safety of all involved.

During this time DHS/SSA continued to stress 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. In addition, while all in-person visit requirements remained in place (i.e. parent-child visit, sibling visit, and monthly caseworker visit) alternative methods for conducting these visits using videoconferencing and other visual communication tools were offered 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 begun to implement the COVID-19 “Roadmap to Recovery” plan in a manner that ensures the health and safety of all Marylanders, DHS/SSA has also been working on a plan to gradually resume in-person visits. Recognizing the importance of parent-child visitation and sibling visits, preserving child-parent and sibling bonding, and the challenges presented through video and telephone conferencing, 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:

- Pre-screening health questions prior to the visit,
- Safety precautions during transportation,
- Sanitization protocols at visitation centers,
- Conducting visits outdoors whenever possible, and
- Requirements for adult visit participants to wear a face covering during the visits. (Children over the age of 2 will be encouraged to wear the face covering but are not required to do so)

The goals of the guidance and protocols being provided ensures the health and safety of children, families, parents, and caregivers and makes the visitation as safe as possible for all participants.





Beginning July 1, 2020, staff will do their best 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.

Prior to the Visit

The Maryland DHS/SSA Visitation Agreement (Attachment) outlines the expectations of in-person visits that participants will be required to review and discuss with the parent and his/her attorney, as well as the resource parents, older children, and the staff supervising the visit prior to resuming in-person visits with their children.

Listed below are some of the key points outlined in the Maryland DHS/SSA Visitation Agreement:

- 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 which includes:
 - 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

During the Visit

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. Attached is 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.

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

DHS/SSA encourages parents and resource parents to continue regular contact through videoconferencing/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. DHS/SSA is committed to providing services in a manner that ensures the health and safety of parents, children, resource parents, and staff.

Questions

Communication during this time is essential. If you have questions about visitation, please talk with your caseworker. We will continue to provide support to you during this time and appreciate your patience and understanding as DHS/SSA continues to respond to the changing conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic in our state.

