



April 5, 2020

Dear Partners –

As all of you know, April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. We take for granted the month will be filled with events and activities highlighting the warning signs of abuse and educating the public on the prevention measures we can take to protect vulnerable children across Illinois. This year will be different.

With the outbreak of the coronavirus, the challenges to keeping children safe has never been greater. The impact of COVID-19 on the daily lives of families across Illinois has been profound. Many families that were already struggling before the pandemic, now find themselves in an unprecedented situation with a lack of childcare, closed schools, limited job opportunities, and social isolation. Add the fear, anxiety and uncertainty that comes with COVID-19, and the risk of children experiencing abuse and neglect is much higher.

Child Abuse Prevention Month may never be more important than it is this April.

Despite the challenges we are all facing right now, I hope your organizations can still find creative ways to use April to build awareness of the increased risk of child abuse and neglect during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Below is a summary of recent important updates from DCFS related to COVID-19. These examples demonstrate that we have rapidly adjusted our system of care so that we can balance the need to reduce the spread of this virus with the ever present need to protect children from the dangers they face even in the best of times.

Much has changed in the last month. What hasn't changed is our shared deep commitment to protecting the health and wellbeing of children.

This work will not end. DCFS will keep adapting and responding to the changing nature of this crisis. And with the actions we must all take as a society, we will continue to assess how these disruptions bring new threats to the wellbeing of our state's children.

There are countless heroes who are serving on the front lines every day to protect us from the corona virus. Among the medical personnel and first responders, let us also count the child protection

investigators and case worker and residential staff who bravely leave their homes every day to continue to protect children from the harms of abuse and neglect.

Thank you for being in this fight with us.

Recent Updates

- 1)** I had the honor of speaking Saturday, April 4, at Governor JB Pritzker's daily Coronavirus press conference. I talked about the many ways the entire child welfare community has prepared for the spread of COVID-19 and how proud I am of all of our staff and the foster parents that continue to serve our children despite the current crisis. The Governor also acknowledged April as Child Abuse Prevention month and spoke of how proud he is of the work you and your staff are doing every day. You can watch [the press conference here](#).
- 2)** Building on the state's efforts to flatten the curve of new COVID-19 cases in Illinois and following careful consultation with experts in Illinois and across the nation, Governor JB Pritzker signed a 30-day extension of the state's disaster proclamation. The disaster proclamation provides the governor the authority to sign additional executive orders, extending the Stay at Home order and suspending on-site learning in K-12 schools through the month of April.
- 3)** With youth in care unexpectedly out-of-school, foster families are experiencing additional food costs and our older youth in care and foster families are experiencing income instability and uncertainty. For March and April, we are extending a \$100 a month supplemental payment to the approximately 18,200 youth in paid out-of-home placements to help with these expenses. The first installment will be paid in mid-April.
- 4)** There are a number of youth in care that don't have access to computers or the internet access required to participate in school while on-site learning continues to be suspended. We are identifying youth in need of a Chromebook and/or Internet access for distance learning and will provide them as necessary.
- 5)** I mention last week that as part of our committed to supporting private agencies, DCFS will be providing additional financial support to residential providers to ensure adequate staffing ratios are maintained while youth remain out of school during the regular school year. With the official extension of the suspension of in-person learning at schools, we are extending the support as well. Effective March 16 through April 30, and extended again as necessary, DCFS will be providing additional financial support amounting to a 20% increase to the non-Medicaid portion of the daily rate. You will be seeing the first installment available mid-April.
- 6)** Last week I notified you that DCFS will make a one-time payment to foster care and intact providers to help address the safety needs of staff providing essential in-home services to ensure the safety of children. Payments are calculated based on your staffing numbers. These funds may be spent in a flexible manner for program expenses related to COVID-19. This includes but is not limited to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); preventative cleaning costs; remedial cleaning costs; or overtime costs related to staff needing to be quarantined to name a few. Agencies will see those one-time payments in mid-April.

- 7)** We know everyone continues to be concerned about the shortage of available protective gear for staff. DCFS has now made available more than 400,000 pairs of gloves across the state, including distributing 93,000 pairs to private agencies. We also distribute 15,000 masks and anticipate additional shipments arriving over the next two weeks. DCFS will continue to share protective gear with your staff and distributes supplies soon as they become available to us. The IDPH and the CDC have [released guidelines for the reuse of protective gear](#) to assist in the safe and effective conservation of supplies.
- 8)** From March 16 through April 30, and longer as needed, in the event fixed-rate (fee-for-service) billings are less than normal, DCFS will provide supplemental funding to make up the lost revenues from reduced billings, as long as agencies continue providing essential services. Supplemental payments will cover the gap between actual, reduced billings, and each provider's average billings prior to the emergency less any other safety-net funding. These payments will prevent the loss of irreplaceable community service providers without requiring a State budget increase. More details about this are included in a memo I sent out on March 20 and is [available here](#).
- 9)** During the current COVID-19 public health crisis, many youth will receive mental health treatment through telecommunication modes. The DCFS Guardian's Office, Office of Legal Services, and Division of Clinical & Child Services have worked together to develop a temporary process to use only during the COVID-19 public health crisis.

Consents for youth under the age of 18 will go through the Guardian's Consent Hotline (800-828-2179), and the request will be submitted through the CFS 431-1 Consent form. If telehealth is used, the consent staff will fill out the additional Informed Consent for Telehealth Services form, which is [available here](#). Additional details are available in a memo that was sent out on April 3, and can be [downloaded here](#).

- 10)** On March 16, Governor JB Pritzker issued [Executive Order 2020-07](#). This order suspended the Open Meetings Act requirements for physical presence at meetings of public bodies for the duration of the Gubernatorial Disaster Proclamation. As a result of the recent spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), DCFS encourages its advisory groups to meet via teleconference or videoconference, or to postpone in-person meetings. Other requirements of the Open Meetings Act, including public postings and public accessibility, continue to apply to DCFS Advisory Boards and Groups. Questions should be directed to the group's assigned staff liaison. Additional details are available in a memo that was sent out on March 31, and can be [downloaded here](#).
- 11)** Birth parents and foster parents have many questions during this uncertain time. We sent a letter to foster parents on March 27, and to birth parents on March 31, outlining how new rules for case worker visits and birth parent visitation will impact them. We will continue to send out a series of letters to foster parents to help address their questions and concerns during this crisis. The birth parent letter can be [viewed here](#). The foster parent letter is available here in [English](#) and here in [Spanish](#).
- 12)** On April 2, the Governor also launched a new statewide effort called 'All in Illinois' to reinforce the state's core message, backed by scientists and public health experts: stay at home and stay safe. As Illinoisans continue to practice social distancing to stay healthy, 'All in Illinois' is a way to

unite residents across the state and remind them we are all in this together.

Your organizations can show your committed to being part of the solution by updating your Facebook profile photos with the All in Illinois frame image and using the #AllinIllinois hashtag. To access the All in Illinois digital tool kit [click here](#).

13) DCFS continues to receive questions from ICOY and directly from our provider community. Our online FAQ responses document has been updated a number of times in the last week with the most current answers to your questions. The latest copy can be downloaded on the [DCFS website here](#).

Daily updates from DCFS on COVID-19 can be found by visiting the [Department's dedicated COVID-19 webpage](#).

Thank you for all your efforts!

Marc D. Smith
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