

DCYF COVID-19 Update for Foster Care Residential Facility Providers

Dear Foster Care Residential Facility Providers,

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) values all that you do for children, families and communities. DCYF fully recognizes the complexities that Foster Care Residential Facility Providers are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are committed to providing you with ongoing, timely coordination and communication.

DCYF is working with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Washington State Department of Health (DOH). We are committed to safely maintaining access to residential facility-based services, while supporting providers with the information and resources they need to continue to offer care and keep clients and staff safe and healthy. This support includes making the current systems, processes and practices as flexible as possible.

DCYF recently implemented the following measures to establish necessary supports for foster care BRS group home providers:

- Supported DOH with developing [Novel Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) Guidance for Foster Care Residential Facilities](#).
- Implemented a [foster care emergency licensing waiver process](#), including some of the background check requirements.
- Suspended all comprehensive review activities.
- Limited all face-to-face contacts and activities. Transitioned to virtual tools, e.g. using video conferencing for health and safety checks.
- Streamlined the administrative review process for all child welfare purposes, including group care by using the previous administrative reviews for a new background check.
- Allowed the use of 'provisional hires' in all group care facilities during this time.
- Transitioned CPR/First Aid trainings exclusively to the online option.

DCYF is working to implement additional contract, background check and licensing practices that will allow the increased use of virtual tools and bring necessary guidance and resources to providers:

- In coordination with DOH, provide detailed quarantine guidance so we can start developing individual site quarantine plans.
- Eliminate duplicate group care fingerprint-based background checks. Use previous background check results for new group care requests when the previous background check meets federal requirements.
- Update contract language to allow flexibility with:
 - Staff-to-child ratios.
 - Performance-based measures and outcomes.
 - Service provision, which may include suspension of all non-essential service activities.

DCYF is partnering with stakeholders to be able to implement the following:

- Emergency licensing process to speed up licensing and establish additional Residential Facility capacity and have state-wide emergency placement options.

- Staffing pool to provide additional staffing resources by recruiting school district staff, students and community members who have skills, knowledge, expertise and experience to serve children residing in residential facilities.

Recognizing the time sensitivity, DCYF will communicate with stakeholders, partners and communities as soon as the efforts above are completed.

We acknowledge that there is uncertainty in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. This increases our responsibility to the most vulnerable populations – children in out-of-home care – even more. Your input, reflections and ideas are very important to us, as they are informing the policy and practice flexibilities that we need to consider for us to continue supporting the children we serve. Above all, our priority is to make sure our programs and services are safe and healthy for staff and our clients.

We want to assure you that our leadership is continuing to monitor any new developments about the spread of the coronavirus. Please visit [DCYF's COVID-19 page](#) for updates and frequently asked questions.

If you have any questions or concerns, email dcyf.covid-19@dcyf.wa.gov. This inbox is monitored daily and responses will be added to the website.

Thank you for all you and your teams do!