

LETTER TO FAMILIES

DECEMBER 4, 2020



Dear DDDS Families,

I am sure you are aware that COVID-19 is running rampant in Delaware right now. As the numbers started to increase a few weeks ago, we knew it wouldn't be long before the DDDS service system was impacted by this new surge. Unfortunately, that time has arrived. In the past week alone, 26 direct support professionals have tested positive for COVID-19. Additionally, 13 service recipients who live in provider-managed settings have also tested positive, as well as many who live at home with their families. Amongst our service recipients, tragically, we have had 11 deaths. The state of Delaware broke its record again yesterday, with the most positive cases at 754 in the past day, and 19.2% of all people tested in the past week coming back positive.

The rate of spread over the past week has forced DDDS and the state as a whole to re-evaluate what we can do to limit the spread of COVID-19 for all Delawareans, particularly our most vulnerable. We have had service recipients contract the virus through family visits and activities in the community, not just from the staff in the homes. *With that in mind, DDDS is putting a temporary freeze on Phase Two of Visitor Access effective today, December 4th.* This means that inside-the-home family visits will not be permissible for the time being. Yesterday Governor Carney announced a Household-Stay-At-Home Advisory from December 14th-January 11th stating the people should not spend indoor time with individuals from other households. I know this is disappointing and frustrating. It is not meant as a punishment for anyone, but instead it's one of the few ways we can limit spread and exposure to our service recipients, direct support professionals and you as families. **Outside open-air visits are still possible and strongly encouraged as well as virtual visits using technology.** I assure you that your loved one's provider agency will work with you to find ways to stay connected and have outside visits. Some providers have had visits where they park their vehicle next to the family vehicle and have the visit through the open windows. Others have utilized gazebos with outdoor heaters for visiting space. Others have hosted visits with the service recipient in the garage with the door open and the family on the driveway. Please offer any creative ideas to your loved one's provider; they are open to suggestions and know how difficult this is going to be. We must work together to ensure the health and safety of our service recipients and the staff who support them.

Additionally, effective today, Consultative Nursing will also go back to only remote audits. This means the Consultative Nurses who have been visiting group homes/community living arrangements in person will cease as well. Again, the goal is to limit every potential exposure point that we can.

Please use every measure you can to reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 exposure and transmission in your own lives. That includes wearing a mask around anyone not in your household- and wearing a mask around your household members if you've been around those outside of your household without a mask, practicing social distancing and washing your hands often.

In closing, I want to be sure that you know we are working with the state about having DDDS provider staff and service recipients identified as priority populations to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. In order to best plan for communication around the COVID-19 vaccine and other resources, please consider participating in a brief survey to assist the Division and the Department with its vaccine planning. You can take the survey here: <https://forms.gle/HEd2qx221jH1m5YZ6>.

Additionally, please consider attending a forum being hosted by the Developmental Disabilities Council and the Center for Disabilities Studies on December 18th from 10:30am – 12:00pm. Please use this [link to register and request accommodations](#).

Please do not hesitate to reach out to your loved one's Support Coordinator, Columbus Community Navigator or the DDDS Family Resource Unit with any concerns or ways DDDS can assist you during this difficult time.

Be well,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP

Director of Community Services