



Letter to DDDS families regarding COVID-19

March 16, 2020

Dear Families of individuals served through DDDS:

As you are well aware, we are in the midst of uncharted territory as Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) is active in Delaware. Please know that the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS) and its network of providers have been working together to plan for how we will handle services, while working diligently to keep exposure and spread of the virus at the minimum.

We have asked all providers of day and residential services, to take the following measures:

- create a back-up plan for how they will handle staff shortages if people call out or become ill. They may need to contact friends and family members of DDDS service recipients to see if they can play any role in providing support during this period.
- increase their attention to and requirement of hand hygiene protocols. This means requiring staff and individuals in programs to wash their hands with soap and water more frequently, as well as use hand sanitizer after every cough or sneeze. We also encourage sanitizing surfaces, especially high-touch surfaces like doorknobs, tabletops, light switches, and the like at a much higher frequency. When in doubt, sanitize.
- not allow sick staff to come to work. Some providers have instituted a process of taking everyone's temperature before allowing them in the building. DDDS supports this initiative. We encourage providers to send staff home if they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19. Keep in mind, it is allergy season, so a snuffle or cough here and there does not necessarily warrant someone being sent home. The Division of Public Health's Medical Director, Dr. Hong, suggested asking, "does this happen to you every year around this time?" as a good way to differentiate allergy symptoms from COVID-19 or the flu.
- send sick individuals supported through their programs home. If someone shows signs of fever or cough, they should not be in the day program. The Division will expedite review of requests from residential providers for increased hours of support to enable them to support individuals during the day who would normally attend a day program. For individuals served through DDDS who live at home with their families, we are asking you to not send your loved one to their day program if they are sick with flu or COVID-19 symptoms.
- consider limiting community exposure where large groups of people gather in close proximity, as recommended by the CDC.
- communicate their plans with family members and staff. We have asked each program site to have a point of contact who can update family members on their loved ones' condition.
- notify DDDS of any modifications to services they plan to make.

We have asked all residential providers to additionally:

- prepare supplies and strategies for supporting individuals at home if they become sick. This means isolating them from other housemates, offer supportive care to alleviate their symptoms, closely monitor for any worsening of symptoms and communicate with family members. The CDC and Delaware's Division of Public Health urges people who are sick to not go to the emergency room or urgent care. Instead, call the person's PCP or their insurance's nurse triage line for further guidance. Most people who get COVID-19 will have a mild case and will recover at home with medications for fever and cough, and by staying hydrated.
- monitor those who are in a high-risk category, both individuals served through DDDS and staff, closely for symptoms and proactively support them.
- have extra supplies in stock, in the event that social distancing becomes mandated. This means an extra supply of prescription medications, food and beverages, and cleaning supplies. The Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance has just announced that they are relaxing early refill limits for prescriptions covered by Medicaid. This will enable families and providers to make sure they have a sufficient supply of prescription medications on hand.

As the situation changes daily, we assure you we are working to ensure the health and safety of all individuals served through DDDS, our Home and Community Based providers and their staff, and our own DDDS staff. Please look for updates on the DDDS website at <https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/ddds/>, We will also post updates on Facebook.

We are all in this together.

Thank you for attention to this matter.