



**DELAWARE HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**DIVISION OF
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES**

COMMUNITY SERVICES

June 24, 2020

Dear DDDS Families,

I hope this letter finds you all well. As the state re-opens and people get excited to move back to their pre-COVID routines, it is more important than ever to keep in mind that the pandemic is still happening. As I'm closely watching the Delaware COVID-19 numbers increase again, I am cautiously optimistic that the numbers amongst of DDDS service recipients continue to be stable. Each email I receive I hold my breath for a second in hopes that it isn't notifying me of a new positive case.

With that being said, the number of COVID-positive DDDS service recipients who live in provider managed settings has remained stable. Let me be clear, we are not out of the woods yet at all. There are still multiple locations where there are COVID-positive service recipients, and some are really struggling right now. We must remain vigilant about protecting the health and safety of our vulnerable population.

I'm ready to move the visitor access into Phase Two, which will permit visits home with family members. This critical step is one that we have to be very serious about, because we are potentially opening the exposure dramatically with this step. In order to be smart and safe, I really need to implore you to follow the parameters set forth below. Ultimately, the duration of the visit must be agreed upon by the provider and the family. I encourage small incremental steps, as opposed to a free-for-all. By being cautious with the visitor access, we can keep tabs on the exposure and be able to curtail it quickly and notify everyone if the numbers start to trend up and we have to go back into sheltering in place with no visitors. I am confident that no one wants to have to go back to that, and therefore, I am expecting full commitment to following the guidelines below:

- The service recipient must be in good health to visit the family home. The provider will continue to monitor for any symptoms of COVID, and if any symptom is present, the visit will be rescheduled. If any of the service recipient's housemates have any symptoms, the visit will be rescheduled.
- Families must commit to not taking the service recipient to any store, restaurant or any other gathering with people outside of the household. These visits are purposely controlled, so if an exposure happens, we know who the service recipient had contact with.
- Service recipients should be transported by the provider's vehicle.
- Family members should be limited in number. We know everyone misses their loved ones, but we need to limit the potential exposure, so we ask that the family members visiting are limited to a very few. Family members must not attend a visit if they have any symptoms of COVID-19 at all. Family members must take their temperature immediately before the visit. If there is a fever over 99.5 degrees, please reschedule for another time.
- Family members must wear a facemask/face covering the entire duration of the visit, aside from sleeping. I know it is weird to wear a mask in your own home, but please keep in mind that your loved one has exposure to their housemates regularly and it's very easy to watch the spread of the virus snowball without these restrictions in place. Ideally the service recipient will wear a facemask too, but we understand that may not be possible. Therefore, it is imperative that family members wear facemasks, to contain their respiratory droplets. According to the CDC, this is the primary method of transmission of the virus.

- Families should try to maintain social distance between their loved one and themselves as much as possible. We know that a hug may happen, especially after such a long time apart, but please try to keep physical contact to a minimum to protect your loved one, the other people with whom they live and their direct support professionals.
- Hand sanitizer should be readily available and used throughout the visit and immediately afterwards.

If the number of service recipients who test positive increases, we will have to move to restricted visitation again. Again, the length of the visit, whether for a few hours or overnight, needs to be agreed upon by the provider and family; just know that the longer the visit lasts, the higher the chance for letting down one's guard and not paying attention to hand hygiene, wearing facemasks etc. A slow, steady approach here is recommended, knowing that again once we demonstrate the health and safety of service recipients is maintained we will all feel more comfortable with longer visits. These are new waters for all of us, so caution is of the utmost importance. Keep in mind the providers have to think about the health and safety of everyone who lives in the home, as well as the staff who have so honorably supported service recipients during these especially difficult times.

As your loved one returns from a visit, providers will ensure they follow the same protocols for hand hygiene that direct support professionals follow each time they enter the home.

Thank you for your on-going support and understanding during the pandemic. I appreciate the seriousness with which you take these matters and hope we can continue to move together towards resuming some of our most cherished relationships.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to your loved one's Support Coordinator, Community Navigator or the Family Resource Unit with any questions or concerns. My next update will hopefully be focused on planning for the staged re-opening of day services, assuming the number of cases stays stable. As always, we really are all in this together.

Be well,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cory Ellen Nourie" followed by the initials "MSS, MLSP".

Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP
Director of Community Services