

**LETTER TO FAMILIES**

August 11, 2021

Dear DDDS Service Recipients and Families,

As we make our way into the final official month of summer, it is not lost on any of us how confusing and seemingly chaotic the world is right now with COVID-19 and the Delta variant. The Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS) continues to monitor the spread of COVID-19 around the state and more particularly within our network of services. In late spring and early summer, we were at a place of stability with far fewer cases of COVID-19 and the sense that the world was sprinting towards fully reopening. Unfortunately, vaccinations plateaued, the Delta variant emerged, and within the DDDS network, we are starting to see an increase in positive cases and exposures again. Thus, we have adjusted course.

At this time, the Governor is urging everyone to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance around indoor face-mask wearing. With an increase in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Delaware, it is recommended that everyone wear a face mask indoors, regardless of vaccine status. *While the CDC guidance is not a mandate, please note that individual businesses, including our providers, are permitted to have their own rules around mask wearing.* Wearing a face mask indoors when around people not from one's household protects the wearer and those around them.

We have seen tremendous progress in getting DDDS services restored for service recipients with the advent and acceptance of the COVID-19 vaccines. All public health agencies strongly encourage everyone eligible to get vaccinated. In Delaware, vaccines are readily available each day. To find a location near you, please visit <https://coronavirus.delaware.gov/vaccine/>.

For those individuals not vaccinated, the Governor and Division of Public Health announced a strong recommendation that anyone unvaccinated participate in at least weekly COVID-19 testing. Curative, Division of Public Health and other testing locations continue to be available statewide, with results coming back within a few days. To find a testing location, please visit <https://coronavirus.delaware.gov/testing/>. Curative, Division of Public Health or other viral testing (also known as PCR testing) should also be completed for anyone with symptoms or a known exposure, even if fully vaccinated. Within our network, providers have the option to become certified to administer Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) to their staff and service recipients they support. Test results with RATs are back in 15 minutes! Currently, 14 providers are actively using Rapid Antigen Tests.

Our providers continue to recruit and onboard new staff. The Direct Support Professional shortage continues to be a real and persistent concern. At this time, every DDDS provider is actively hiring. If you

know someone who is interested in working in the field supporting individuals with developmental disabilities and making a difference in people's lives, please encourage them to contact one of our providers.

As the situation evolves over the coming weeks, please remain in contact with your Columbus Community Navigator, DDDS Support Coordinator, DDDS Employment Navigator, Long Term Services & Supports (LTSS) Care Coordinator or the DDDS Family Resource Unit for updates. Please also remain in contact with your day provider, as they work to support more and more service recipients in person.

Please continue to use all the strategies that have worked in the past 17 months to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Wear a face mask indoors. Practice social distancing when around others not from your household. Wash or sanitize your hands frequently. Wash high-touch surfaces. When in doubt, quarantine and get tested. We can overcome this pandemic, but we need everyone to do their part.

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