



October 16, 2020

Dear DDDS Families and Service Recipients,

I wanted to touch base to keep the communication open and transparent, even though there isn't much of an update to share about how services are changing right now. I know it's frustrating and everyone, myself included, is really looking forward to a time when life can resume some level of normalcy and when COVID-19 is a thing of the past. As data on new cases around the country demonstrates, we aren't there yet.

Since I last wrote, there was an influx of direct support professionals (DSP), who work in provider managed residential sites, who tested positive. As of today, there have been 89 DSPs who tested positive since the pandemic started. Previously, when one DSP tested positive, it was pretty likely that at least one service recipient in their contact would subsequently test positive. Fortunately, this has not been the case in the past month. While we had an increase in new positives for service recipients, it has not been as high as the previous months. Currently, there have been 68 service recipients who live in a provider managed setting who have tested positive with COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. Tragically, over the last month three of those service recipients have died, for a total of 10. Each death shakes DDDS and its provider network to our cores; the loss is felt significantly and has a ripple effect amongst the service recipients' friends, families, and support staff. COVID-19 is a deadly virus. While some people have been lucky to remain asymptomatic even though they test positive, those people with symptoms have more difficult clinical outcomes, in part due to the high likelihood of other medical conditions and vulnerabilities.

Because the virus is still rampant in Delaware, even though the percent positive has dropped from 8.1% to 5.5% in the past two weeks, we remain in a holding pattern with return to services as we previously knew them. For those whose loved ones live in provider managed settings, we remain in Phase Two of visitor access, meaning you may have outside visits at their home or they may come home to you for a visit. It is important to note that this is at the discretion of the residential provider, based on the current situation and the ability for everyone to follow the protocols of mask wearing and maintaining social distancing. DDDS supports the residential providers in limiting or disallowing home visits if there is concern for the health and safety of your loved one or their potential exposure and bringing the virus back to their home. Please work with your loved one's residential provider to discuss more details. We are also working through strategies to support visits happening once the colder months hit us and being outside is not necessarily viable. Please share any ideas with your loved one's provider!

Facility-based congregate day services remain in Stage One, where those who can wear masks with minimal prompting, maintain social distance and practice hand hygiene are attending in-person. It is a very small percentage of the total DDDS service recipient population who is able to follow those guidelines. A handful of day providers have begun offering virtual day services. DDDS is working with the other day providers to strategize how they can offer virtual day services. If you have any questions, please contact your loved one's day services provider for more details.


DDDS Support Coordinators, Employment Navigators, Family Resource Unit team members and Columbus' Community Navigators continue to support service recipients during this difficult time. Lifespan Plan meetings are happening, service recipients are participating in virtual tours with new providers, service recipients are accessing respite funding to assist with care in their family home, and our staff continue to reach out to stay connected and answer questions. Please, if you need to contact anyone from DDDS, begin with your Support Coordinator so they can facilitate the connection. They are your first point of contact within the Division and will assist you.

Now that flu season is upon us, please consider getting the flu vaccine as well. DDDS residential providers have begun having flu clinics for service recipients in their care. We are also working with the Medicaid Managed Care Organizations to allow flu shots to be administered inside residential sites particularly for those who are very vulnerable and do not want to risk going out in public to a community site. Medical and dental appointments are happening remotely if possible, and in-person if the service recipient can wear a mask. Routine screening (if no history or symptoms of the disease is present) may be deferred until a later date.

As we make it through month seven of living amidst a pandemic, I urge you all to continue to take COVID-19 seriously. Follow the CDC's guidelines by wearing a facemask at all times you're in proximity to people who are not in your household, practice social distancing in the community, and be sure to keep washing or sanitizing your hands.

Thank you for your patience in this challenging time. As daunting as it seems, we will eventually get through this together. In the meantime, please be well and take care of each other. Do not hesitate to reach out to your Support Coordinator, Employment Navigator, Family Resource Coordinator, or Columbus Community Navigator for anything.

Be well,

Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP

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