

LETTER TO FAMILIES

DECEMBER 15, 2020



Dear DDDS Families,

I wanted to send a follow-up letter with clarification around the temporary suspension of the Phase Two Visitor Access that went into effect on December 4th. (Phase Two Visitor Access allowed **indoor** home visits for service recipients.) I have heard from several families and many providers who have expressed concern over the temporary restriction and what that means for the Christmas and New Year holidays.

The temporary suspension went into effect in conjunction with Governor Carney’s advisory to “not gather with anyone outside of your household, in their home or yours,” and after extraordinarily high positive cases amongst our service recipients and direct support professionals. The sharp increase in cases started around Thanksgiving and continues to remain elevated. To give some perspective, in the past 72 hours, there have been 12 service recipients receiving residential habilitation who have tested positive and 17 direct support professionals who have tested positive. Sadly, we have had another service recipient die from COVID-19, bringing our total to 12 lives lost during the pandemic.

The temporary visitor restriction is to limit as many potential exposure points as possible for our service recipients, their direct support professionals and your families. It is true that direct support professionals come and go throughout the week, that is the nature of their job. We need them to continue to show up each day to offer the supports necessary to help service recipients live their good lives, even in the midst of a pandemic. These professionals are on the front lines in the care they provide, and we appreciate all they’ve done in these unprecedented times.

Here are two points of clarification about the temporary visitor restrictions:

1. If you want to have your loved one come visit with you in your home, that is permissible, but **only if** the visit can extend through January 11, 2021. There can be no back and forth visits from his/her home and the family home at this time. So, if a service recipient leaves his/her home to visit with family in their home today, tomorrow, next week or the week after s/he must plan to stay with their family until January 11th. Please discuss with your loved one’s provider agency what the requirements will be to return to his/her home on/or after January 11, 2021. This is to stay aligned with the Governor’s order to “not gather with anyone outside of your household, in their home or yours.” If the Governor changes that order, we will update accordingly.

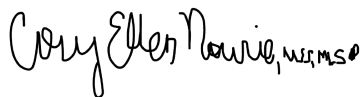
2. As noted above, the restriction went into effect because of the skyrocketing numbers of new positives in the state and particularly within our network at Thanksgiving. Prior to Thanksgiving the seven day percent positive rate for tests was 6%. *When the state's seven-day percent positive rate for tests falls back to 6%, we will release the Temporary Suspension of the Phase Two Visitor Access, even if it is before January 11th.* My sincere hope is that the cases start to stabilize, and families are able to spend time together again indoors sooner rather than later. This may mean that indoor visits at the family home could resume by Christmas, but this depends upon the percent positive test rate for Delaware. As we watch the data reported each day, it should be easy to track as the percent positive rate trends down, so everyone can follow along. Currently, the rate is 9.6%. I will be ecstatic to yell it from the rooftops as soon as we hit the 6% mark.

We know that there is no way to completely isolate everyone from COVID-19, but we must do everything we can to reduce the spread amongst our DDDS network. We are in the final stages of operationalizing COVID-19 vaccine administration plans for the new year, as well as having testing more readily available for our provider network and service recipients. I will share more details with you as they are finalized.

Please know we recognize these are challenging times for everyone. The holidays are typically filled with happiness and celebrations, but this year it has to be different to ensure the health and safety of everyone. Together, we will get through this and hopefully be able to make up for lost time in 2021.

Please reach out to your loved one's Support Coordinator, Columbus Community Navigator or the DDDS Family Resource Unit for assistance.

Be well,



Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP

Director of Community Services