

Guidelines for Contact with Clients During the Outbreak of COVID-19

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS) is issuing the following guidance for all MDCPS staff. This guidance is intended to provide staff procedures that will ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children in MDCPS custody or under the Department's supervision while minimizing the risk of exposure to the novel coronavirus of 2019 (COVID-19). All staff are expected to follow these procedures until further notice.

Please review this information, including the links below, with your leadership and staff and make any necessary adjustments to your policies and protocols. This guidance is not intended to address every scenario that may arise. MDCPS will continue to issue updates and guidance as circumstances change. In addition, all staff should continue to monitor updates from state and federal health officials, including the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH), the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), and the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

A. Guidance for Making In-Home Visits

This guidance applies to **all in-home visits** for any purpose.

When preparing for an in-home visit, staff must make a phone call to the home and speak with a member of the household prior to making the planned visit. During that phone call, ask the household member whether they or any other member of the household have:

1. traveled outside the United States or used mass transit (bus, train, air, etc.) within the United States within the last 14 days;
 2. had contact with anyone with known COVID-19, or with anyone undergoing medical evaluation to determine whether they have COVID-19, within the last 14 days; and
 3. has any symptoms of a respiratory infection (e.g., cough, sore throat, fever, or shortness of breath).
- If the household member responds “No” to all three questions, proceed with the visit as normal.
 - If the household member responds “Yes” to any of the three questions, immediately staff the case with a supervisor to assess whether there are any urgent risks or needs requiring immediate attention.
 - If there are urgent needs, assess whether those needs can be safely met remotely (e.g., over the phone, through Facetime, etc.).
 - If the urgent needs can be met remotely, forego an in-person visit and meet the needs remotely, instruct the household member to stay home and

contact the Mississippi State Department of Health to report their potential exposure to COVID-19, and contact the Mississippi State Department of Health directly to report the potential case of COVID-19.

- If the client must be seen in person to meet urgent needs, instruct the affected household member to remain at home and contact their medical professional immediately, to use a mask if available, to place themselves in a separate room with the door closed if possible, and to be assessed by a medical professional before the visit occurs if time permits. When making the visit in the home with an affected household member, avoid all contact with the affected household member if possible and limit time in the home to that necessary to meet the urgent needs.
- If there are not urgent needs, instruct the household member to stay home and contact the Mississippi State Department of Health to report their potential exposure to COVID-19, and contact the Mississippi State Department of Health to directly report the potential case of COVID-19.

B. Guidance for Investigations

Child abuse and neglect investigations must proceed even as we move through the spread of COVID-19. When making initial contact with any individual during an investigation, ask the three questions above. If the individual answers “Yes” to any of the three questions, instruct the individual to stay home and contact the Mississippi State Department of Health to report their potential exposure to COVID-19, and contact the Mississippi State Department of Health directly to report the potential case of COVID-19. Further, limit contact with potentially affected individuals to the minimum amount necessary to complete the investigation.

C. Guidance for Screening Visitors to Offices and Residential Facilities

These procedures are for any office or facility that remains open and receives visitors or members of the public as a part of its daily operations.

- All facilities and offices receiving regular in-person contact with members of the public must immediately develop policies to schedule and pre-screen over the telephone all visits by non-clients, residents, or staff using the three questions above.
 - Upon screening, if a potential visitor answers “Yes” to any of the three questions above, politely instruct them not to visit the facility or office until the specific scenario can be further assessed and to contact the Mississippi State Department of Health to report their potential exposure to COVID-19.
- If a facility or office receives unscheduled visitors, politely instruct them to leave and call to schedule a visit

D. Guidance for Case Staffing

Supervisors must continue weekly case staffing. All case staffing must be conducted remotely via telephone, Facetime, etc.

E. General Guidelines

Any other tasks ordinarily involving direct contact with clients—including, but not limited to, foster care reviews and family team meetings—should be conducted remotely if possible.

Additionally, everyone should follow the CDC’s guidelines for infection control basics including hand hygiene:

- [Infection Control Basics](#)
- [Hand Hygiene in Health Care Settings](#)
- [Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives](#)

F. Contact with Affected Persons

Staff who have had direct contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 must immediately self-quarantine for a period of fourteen days. During the self-quarantine period, staff must continue to telework, but should have no contact with clients and other staff. If symptoms develop during the self-quarantine period, contact your medical provider. If you test positive for COVID-19, report your positive test to MDCPS-COVID19@mdcps.ms.gov.

G. Documenting Impacts of COVID-19

If any work cannot be completed because of exposure or potential exposure to COVID-19, staff must document each task that was not completed because of COVID-19 through a narrative in MACWIS. This documentation must be made by entering contact type “Other,” appropriate contact method, and appropriate location with a narrative explaining the response to the screening question that prevented the task’s completion.

H. MDCPS Contracted Providers

All MDCPS contracted providers should consider this guidance non-exhaustive minimum guidelines. In addition to these guidelines, all providers should implement approved continuity of operations plans and such other preventative measures as they deem appropriate under the guidance issued by federal and state health officials.