

Coronavirus Q&A Webinar #10 with DCFS Acting Director Marc Smith

Monday, June 10, 2020 (Recording: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/7558539216383923202>)

DCFS Acting Director Marc Smith:

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, again. This is a very sad and challenging time for all of us...[call cuts out]. Okay, we'll get rolling.

Here are a number of updates since our last phone call.

Today, the Department updated our out-of-state travel policy to reflect the state moving forward into Phase 3 of the Restore Illinois plan. As a result, youth in care may travel out of state with approval. The decision to permit travel will be made by DCFS regional administrator or POS program manager or the equivalent.

In order to request approval, caseworkers shall complete the consent for out-of-state travel form and submit the form for supervisory approval. Once approved by the supervisor, the request will be forwarded to the regional administrator or the program manager or prior for final approval.

Prior to approval, a number of factors are being considered, including the purpose of the trip, and what the destination state is. Will the trip impact services or visitation? The goal for youth traveling out of state is to ensure families are able to provide the same level of protection that they will receive if they stayed here in Illinois. For example, they use face coverings, social distancing, and the restriction on the number of people gathered together should still be followed - even if the rules in the state they are visiting are less restrictive.

The Department recently released a [memo providing guidance to DCFS and POS direct staff on cases in which court ordered in-person, parent, child visitation](#), contrary to the guidance set forth in our Prior Actual Action Transmittal on visitation. The guidance outlines compliance with the court orders while promoting the safety of our children, parents, and staff. The guidance requires prescreening questions for everyone involved in the visit. Also, unless exempt, face coverings shall always be worn by all participants in the parent child visits.

Individuals attending visits should comply with social distancing requirements during the visit. To minimize risk of spread of COVID-19, gifts and packages shall not be exchanged at visits. Substitute caregivers should send children with snacks to avoid food sharing and unnecessary travel to businesses. And visitations shall not take place in the study with more than 10 people in the immediate vicinity. Policy related to visitation will continue to evolve as a crisis in this crisis as circumstances change. The Department will be putting out updated guidance in the weeks ahead, as it becomes safe and medically appropriate to return to in person visitation.

The Department recently provided [guidance related to child welfare staffing needs during COVID-19 crisis](#).

Depending on the staffing and case load needs, POS agencies may assign staff as necessary to participate in workload reassignment to support their offices. Workload reassignment may consist of case assignment within the worker's current specialty or across specialties. The staffing guidance allows for staff to cross specialty areas that need it. It allows offices to meet the needs of their children and families. We know that workers have basic competencies and proficiencies in their service area and they are transferrable. The guidance provides a tiered pathway to assist the staffing during a crisis.

In addition to recent guidelines we have released, I wanted to take the opportunity to answer some recent ICOY questions. **One of those questions is if the Department intends to extend the 20% enhancement for residential providers, and if the \$100 additional board payments will be extended.** The Department has a number of budget considerations we are working through before we can continue to extend these enhancements every June. We intend to have an answer to the provider community by early next week.

We've also receive questions related to consent for Telehealth. The Departments' original guidance gave telehealth consent through June first. We issued new guidance that extends these types of consents, including those already approved by the DCSF guardianship administrator to now expire July 31, 2020.

All of the action transmittal memos and updates can be found on the [DCFS COVID-19 page](#) and have been posted on the dnet.

Lastly, I want to update you all on protective gear and testing. DCFS continues to provide protective gear to our staff and yours, particularly residential providers who have a very high demand per year. Last Wednesday, we put our most recent announcement of new PPE supplies being available. To date we have provided more than two million masking gloves, more than 100,000 safety glasses, gowns and shoe covers, over 14,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, more than 5,000 bottles are hospital grade disinfectant spray, and over 3,000 bottles of disinfecting wipes. While many PPE supplies are becoming easier to acquire, the Department continues to deliver the supplies to the provider community.

The Department has also been committed to helping the provider community and our own staff have easier access to testing. As all of you know, prior to testing, priority testing for DCFS and POS staff has been available at six different Aunt Martha's locations throughout the north-east portion of the state. We are thrilled to announce that [the testing for POS staff is also available at three additional DCFS sites across the state.](#)

DCFS and POS staff can be tested at the 1124 North Walnut Street, Springfield Office, and at our Mount Vernon office, and at our Wood River site. Staff do not need to have COVID- 19 symptoms to be tested.

Testing is available weekly, on Mondays, between 9-11 am and Tuesdays between 10 am and noon. We will

add additional days and times if there is demand. Staff can call to schedule the appointments, or walk-ins are also accepted. Look for announcements to go out later today.

And I appreciate your attention to our announcement. But before I end, I'd like to talk a little bit about the things that are going on. It is a very challenging time for us a DCFS, and also for the children and families that we serve. And I think that we have to be perfectly clear that DCFS stands with and understand the challenges that our communities are going through right now.

It is our responsibility as a child welfare system or the state of Illinois to always be righteous in our stance for equality and support. These are very critical times for not only our staff and our children and families, but our communities. We want to encourage you to work with your clinical team to be there for your kids.

DCFS is working on clinical guidance to talk to, talk with, and support our children through this hard time. We are encouraging our staff to get the support that is available to them. And we encourage all of you to do the same.

The things that are going on in our communities reflect a level of frustration and fear. That will not stop when the protests end. We understand that our children and families are disproportionately impacted by racism, brutality, and disproportionality in many ways. We support our staff and our child welfare community in working to address and survive in these very hard times. Thank you.

If you have additional field-specific questions for DCFS around coronavirus, please [submit them here](#).

DCFS will hold a standing listen-only webinar **every other Monday** at 4 pm to address submitted questions and deliver updates. The next webinar will be on **Monday, June 15 at 4 pm**. [You can register for that here](#).