

Coronavirus Q&A Webinar #5 with DCFS Acting Director Marc Smith April 15, 2020

DCFS Acting Director Marc Smith - Intro

Before I get started, I do really want to say that we've all really been really impressed with how well we had the community really stepped up during this crisis. I was able to be on a call with the Governor this week, and with the staff a couple of days later, and we really got a lot of positive feedback about the way our work is moving. And the way that we're responding in this crisis as a system. I think that this is one of those times where people underestimated the level of commitment and expertise that we have as a child welfare system. And I think it's important that we acknowledge and accept, frankly, the concept that we are the assigned professionals and we take that that role and responsibility seriously. We have serious people who are addressing these problems in the private and public sector. And we are not surprised, in the least that we had the capacity to do the things that needed to be done to protect our kids and to continue to protect our kids, and to work with our families. So I appreciate that from everybody. And I hope that you feel that as well.

We've been talking to legislators here at DCFS who have asked questions and we had a legislative meeting where we gave them a lot of feedback on the work that we were doing. And part of the unusual response to that is that we only had one legislator really reach out and ask questions after that meeting. And she missed the beginning of the conversation and we were able to answer her question just by re-addressing what we talked about at the beginning of that conversation. We have not a lot of situations where our legislative partners have felt so supported. And I think that's because of the good work that we're doing. So I just wanted to start off with that and give everybody a little kudos on that. And then let's get started.

Updates

Thank you for the opportunity to continue to update you about the Department's response for COVID-19 and to respond to your questions that we've been discussing over the last week. There have been a number of updates since our last call: essential activities, such as our finance department, our licensing staff, and our monitoring teams, are continuing to perform their duties. Some of you have already seen an increase in your contract payments or foster care, intact, and residential services.

We know you have questions and concerns regarding the number of child welfare issues in light of the COVID-19 public health emergency, including the ongoing role of juvenile court. We want to invite you to a discussion with our general counsel and other leadership at DCFS. The discussion will provide an overview of what is happening in the courts across Illinois 102 counties, and what to consider as this crisis continues and the weeks and months ahead, and the expectation of the courts. We are hosting a discussion this Thursday, April 16, at 2 pm. [Registration for this event can be found on the department's COVID web page or HERE.](#)

On March 7, we issued a memo outlining the process for notifying the department when a youth in care is exposed, becomes symptomatic, or is confirmed to have COVID-19. The memo also includes a new DCFS guardians office form for the collection of information related to this report. The guidelines specify that DCFS needs to be notified when a youth in custody or in legal guardianship of DCFS has been exposed to, is symptomatic, is awaiting test results, or has tested positive for COVID-19. The Department shall be notified by calling the DCFS guardians office consent hotline at 1-800-828-2179. The guidelines include additional details, which are available on the DCFS website and on the dNet.

DCFS has received lots of questions from our staff and yours related to the proper use of protective equipment. We work with our DCFS medical team to put together an easy-to-follow guide for proper techniques on putting on and removing non-sterile examination gloves. We also issued guidelines for how to properly put on and take off disposable respirators. Both of these guidelines were released this week. Poster-size versions of these documents are being printed and sent to DCFS and POS offices as we speak.

On March 17, the Department of Health and Human Services announced an unprecedented step to expand access to telehealth services during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services expanded Medicare coverage for telehealth visitation. The HHS Office for Civil Rights announced it will waive potential penalties under HIPAA for good faith-use of telehealth during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The Health and Human Service Office of the Inspector General also provided flexibility for healthcare providers to reduce or to waive beneficiary cost sharing for telehealth visits paid by the federal health care programs. This information and additional information related to providing telehealth services during the COVID-19 public health emergency was released by the Department last week and are available on our website and dNet.

With physical school buildings closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the added stress the families are experiencing with our with this health care crisis, students are particularly vulnerable and are currently at greater risk of harm. Since the closure of schools and mid-March, our hotline calls have dramatically decreased and the current and are currently down by approximately 60%.

We issued a memo last week to educators at every school district across the state and through across the state through the ISBE newsletters to educators. The memo reminds educators that their assessments of safety of our most vulnerable children are needed now more than ever. Their ability to see children during distance learning video sessions may be the only time children are being seen outside of their immediate family. The memo is available on the ISBE website and on the DCFS COVID web page and dNet.

DCFS released a number of action transmittals in the past week. The first action transmittal provided guidance to DCFS licensing staff, POS Foster Care Licensing staff, daycare agencies and institutions, DCFS foster homes, and POS foster home licensing staff in order to minimize the risk of becoming infected or spreading COVID-19 while servicing youth in care.

The second action transmittal was to notify all DCFS and POS agencies, permanency and adoption staff, and supervisors of actions being taken within the youth cash assistance program for the duration of the COVID-19 public health crisis. Again, both transmission transmittals are on the DCFS website and the dNet.

We know that the shortage of protective gear for staff continues to be on the top of the minds of many of you. We share your concerns. **We previously shipped out 400,000 pairs of gloves and 15,000 masks across the state. This week we received and shipped out on the same day over 3,000 masks, new cleaning supplies, protective gloves, and hand sanitizer to private agency partners that requested assistance with PPE.** The masks were sent to residential providers to address the higher risk associated with congregate care settings.

We realize our staff and yours will need additional protective gear supplies. DCFS is working closely every day with other state agencies and vendors around the world to secure additional protective gear. Whenever we receive additional supplies we will continue to share them with our POS partners like we did this week. Our securement department is working on making it easier for you to request supplies from the Department. **They have created a new form that is easy to fill out and in a dedicated mailbox the form can be emailed to.** Look for additional guidance regarding this process to come out soon.

Additionally, as we have worked to conserve our supply in protective gear, please visit the DCFS website and review the IDPH and the CDC guidelines for reuse of protective gear to assist in the safety and effective conservation of the supplies that you have on hand.

Many of you have been asking about the foster care, intact family and independent living providers one-time flexible funding payments. If you received your payment already, that is your total payment. **A one-time payment will be made to agencies to provide case management services for youth foster care, intact families, and youth in independent living programs to address the safety needs of staff providing essential and home services and to ensure the safety of children. These funds may be spent in a flexible manner for program expenses related to COVID-19.** This includes, but is not limited to, personal protective equipment, preventative cleaning cost, remedial cleaning cost, and overtime costs related to staff needing to be quarantined. This one-time payment is being processed quickly to help address immediate COVID-19 related costs. Many of you are already receiving this payment.

As we talk and address the issues presented today, please feel free to review any of our policies or transmittals, on our DCFS website, or dNet. We try to keep this information posted and up to date as quickly as possible. These conversations are very helpful. We want to ensure that we have open and quick communication to address your needs. I hope that this conversation has been supportive.

ICOY CEO Andi Durbin

Thank you. I appreciate the clarification and the effort to make it easy to find the information. We look forward to talking to everyone next [Monday, April 20 at 4 pm.](#)

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

DCFS will hold a standing listen-only webinar every Monday at 4 pm to address submitted questions and deliver updates. The next webinar will be on **Monday, April 20 at 4 pm**. [You can register for that here](#).