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COVID-19 home visits, carer assessment and authorisations, carer reviews, home safety inspections and face-to-face family time

13 May 2020

This is an update to information previously issued by the Office of the Children's Guardian regarding home visits, carer assessment and authorisations, carer reviews, home safety inspections and face-to-face family time during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Current education advice

NSW Education has advised that from 11 May 2020, students will attend school one day per week and a phased operating model for NSW schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Information about school attendance for students in NSW

Current health advice

In the first instance, all agencies should always confirm current health advice regarding COVID-19 with the Australian Government Department of Health and NSW Health. The following sites hold relevant advice and resources:

- Australian Government Department of Health: Coronavirus (COVID-19) resources
- NSW Health: COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

NSW Health advised that from 1 May 2020, up to two adults and their dependent children can visit another household (you will still need to practice social distancing, good personal hygiene and take extra care when visiting vulnerable people).

NSW Health has also announced a further easing of restrictions from 15 May 2020 that allows up to five visitors to a household at any one time. If you are feeling unwell, you should not visit other people at home, even if you only have mild symptoms – like tiredness or a sore throat.

Visit [what you can and can't do under the rules](#) to keep up to date with changes to public health rules in NSW.

Agency policy and procedure

Advice on managing COVID-19 is changing rapidly, often daily. It is essential that for the duration of this pandemic, agencies keep informed of these changes and incorporate current health advice into casework practice.

Each agency is responsible for seeking its own legal advice and determining its own policy and procedures in the best interests of the health and welfare of children, young people, carers, volunteers and staff. Agencies should review policies and procedures and align these with the current advice available from websites listed above for:

- NSW Health, including changes to any public health orders
- NSW Education, including changes to school operations and student attendance

Agencies are also responsible for effectively communicating changes to policies and procedures with all those affected in a timely manner, including when these evolve as advice from health and education authorities changes, restrictions increase or lift and children and young people return to school.

Home visits, carer assessment and authorisations, carer reviews and home safety inspections

In accordance with *Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care* Standard 15, designated agencies must ensure that all placements of children and young people in statutory out-of-home care are monitored and supported according to individual circumstances. This includes regular

contact with children and young people and the adults caring for them.

In line with the NSW Health advice effective 1 and 15 May 2020 outlined above, there are no health restrictions prohibiting agency staff from entering placements to complete home visits, carer assessment and authorisations, carer reviews, home safety inspections, and assess the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in statutory out-of-home care.

Carers, children and young people may be fearful that home visits present a health risk during the pandemic, so it is important that agencies provide clear assurances for home visit procedures based on current health advice from the Australian Government Department of Health and NSW Health, taking extra care while visiting vulnerable people.

Individual circumstances will vary. If there are any circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic in which agency staff are unable to enter a placement where a child or young person in statutory out-of-home care is living, to complete home visits, carer assessment and authorisations, carer reviews or home safety inspections, please contact the Accreditation and Monitoring Team on 02 8219 3796 to consult on a case-by-case basis.

Face-to-face family time

Cancelling face-to-face family time due to the COVID-19 pandemic may contribute to children and young people in statutory out-of-home care

becoming socially isolated and may cause psychological distress for children, young people and their birth families during these unprecedented times. Recent changes and additional easing of restrictions from 15 May 2020 outlined on websites listed above, may assist agencies to facilitate face-to-face family time for some households.

Family time and changes to restrictions on gathering and movement

According to Public Health (COVID-19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement) Order 2020 effective 31 March 2020:

Leaving a place of residence “for children who do not live in the same household as their parents or siblings or one or more of their parents or siblings – continuing existing arrangements for access to, and contact between, parents and children or siblings” is a reasonable excuse.

Other reasonable excuses to leave the person’s place of residence include, but are not limited to:

- travel for the purposes of work or education if not possible at home
- travelling for the purposes of attending childcare
- accessing public services (whether provided by Government, a private provider or a non-government organisation, including social services)

- for emergencies and compassionate reasons
- undertaking any legal obligations.

A person must not participate in a gathering in a public place or more than two persons, however, this does not apply to:

- a gathering for work
- a gathering of members of the same household
- a gathering to provide care or assistance to a vulnerable person
- a gathering necessary for the person to fulfil a legal obligation.

Please refer to the Public Health (COVID-19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement) Order 2020 (effective 31 March 2020) and any subsequent Public Health Orders for full information. Agencies should also contact NSW local governments regarding any closures of specific public places in the local area (for example some beaches have been closed).

NSW Health advice effective 15 May 2020, includes further easing of restrictions that permits outdoor gatherings of up to ten people and use of outdoor equipment with caution (keeping up high rates of testing; continuing to practice physical distancing and good handwashing hygiene; if you have even the mildest symptoms, you should stay at home). Cafes and restaurants can also seat 10 patrons at any one time.

Agencies should consider how they can arrange and facilitate face-to-face family time taking into consideration the information outlined above (what is legal and safe). This is particularly crucial for children and young people with a case plan goal of restoration, with

increasing frequency and duration of face-to-face family time being critical to the restoration process.

If an agency decides to suspend or cancel face-to-face family time for reasons due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the rationale for this decision should be clearly documented by the agency and will be subject to review by the Office of the Children's Guardian after the pandemic period has passed.

If you have any questions about face-to-face family time during the COVID-19 pandemic, please contact the Accreditation and Monitoring Team on 02 8219 3796.

Previous point-in-time advice regarding arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic is available on our [fact sheet page](#). **Please note that these resources reflect restrictions imposed at the time of publication:**

- COVID-19 Home safety checklist for the provisional authorisation of carers (129KB)
- COVID-19 Changes to WWCC proof of identity requirements for authorised carers and adult household members
- COVID-19 response update
- COVID-19 casework considerations
- COVID-19 Authorisation of staff to provide foster care during the pandemic (314.8KB)

Note: This advice is current on 13 May 2020 and may be updated over time.

