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COVID-19 FAQ

8 April 2020

The World Health Organisation has declared COVID-19 (often referred to as the “novel coronavirus”) a global pandemic.

The challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic are unprecedented and Office of the Children's Guardian is committed to supporting voluntary out-of-home care service providers respond to this health crisis and ensure the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people, their carers and employees.

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 or NSW Health. The following sites hold a range

of relevant advice and resources:

- Resources | Australian Government Department of Health
- NSW Health – COVID-19 (Coronavirus) – Diseases

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.

Agencies are encouraged to check www.nsw.gov.au regularly to receive accurate, up-to-date health information and instructions.

The current health recommendations and government directives in relation to COVID-19 require agencies to find new ways of working with children and young people and their carers.

How do my staff renew their Working With Children Check?

The NSW Government has progressed legislation to help respond to the COVID-19 crisis. This allows the Children's Guardian to extend Working With Children Check clearances, where appropriate, to help organisations continue to deliver critical services to children and young people.

All clearances that are due to expire between 26 March 2020 to 26 September 2020 have been extended by six months. The six-month

extension applies from the date of the current expiry.

Those people who are affected by this change will be sent an email advising them of their new expiry date. Please remind employees, carers and volunteers to ensure their contact details are up to date in the Working With Children Check system. They can do this by using our [Change of registration details form](#).

Individuals applying for a clearance for the first time will still need to apply through the normal processes which include attending a Service NSW centre to verify their identity.

Will employers be notified about changes in employee's Working With Children Check clearance status?

Continuous checking will be maintained, and employers will be alerted if an individual receives a bar or an interim bar, disqualifying them from working with children and young people.

It is important that you keep your agency's contact details up to date on the [Working With Children Check Employer Portal](#).

You can find more information in our website news item on [extending Working With Children Check clearances](#).

Do I still need to enter placements onto the

VOOHC Register?

Yes. All agencies that provide voluntary out-of-home care must continue to lodge all placements onto the VOOHC Register within 5 working days of the placement start and end date. Please contact our Monitoring Team by email at voohc@kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au if you experience any issues with this.

The Office of the Children's Guardian has scheduled an onsite visit with my agency for May. Will this go ahead?

We have suspended all onsite visits until further notice. Wherever possible, we will undertake desktop or remote monitoring. We will contact agencies in the coming weeks to discuss alternative monitoring assessment arrangements.

Do I still need to consider the age of the child when providing emergency placement?

Yes. Agencies must continue to comply with section 3.6 of the Statutory Procedures Voluntary out-of-home care in NSW. Agencies should consider the age, developmental capacity, interests and other support needs when determining the appropriateness of voluntary out-of-home care placement.

Young people (aged 16–17) may be placed with either child or adult clients in centre-based or residential care according to their individual

needs. A formal risk assessment must be conducted. It should include the development, documentation and implementation of appropriate risk management plans.

Children (aged under 16) should only ever be placed in centre-based or residential care with adult clients in exceptional circumstances, where a formal risk assessment has been conducted and the placement approved by the voluntary out-of-home care agency's chief executive or their senior delegate and consented to by the parent of the child.

Any placement of children and adults together must be approved by the agency's chief executive or their senior delegate and should be regularly reviewed to determine the ongoing suitability of the arrangement.

My agency provides a placement for a child who requires a case plan. Do we need to meet the case planning requirements?

Yes. All agencies that provide voluntary out-of-home care placement requiring a case plan must continue to meet case planning requirements. It is a legal requirement that a child or young person must not remain in VOOHC for more than a total of 180 days in a 12 month period unless the child or young person has a case plan that meets their needs or to manage particular risks associated with their care.

We can't complete case planning due to not being

able to access the relevant stakeholders, what should we do?

We understand that getting all relevant stakeholders together at the moment may be challenging. We encourage you to explore other ways to ensure case conferences occur in other ways, for example, by phone or other digital alternatives such as Skype or Zoom. Ensure you document all attempts in meeting the case planning requirements, such as emails and phone calls with the relevant stakeholders.

Do I need to report to the Office of the Children's Guardian if a voluntary out-of-home care unit is closed due to isolation requirements?

No. You must, however, advise the parents or the person with parental responsibility of all children and young people in your care and follow the health advice from the NSW Government.

Will placing a child in isolation or quarantine constitute prohibited practice?

If a child or young person has been directed under medical advice to be in isolation or quarantine, it is not a prohibited practice.

Use of physical restraint is not permitted.

If physical restraint is used to prevent a child or young person from

leaving the house, then it is considered a prohibited practice and could be considered reportable conduct, which must be reported to the Reportable Conduct Team at the Office of the Children's Guardian.

If agencies or carers isolate a child or young person because they are concerned about their health but there is no directive from a medical practitioner then this could be considered a prohibited practice.

Agencies must, in any event, continue to use only behaviour management practices approved by the relevant agency.

If the approved behaviour management practices are not sufficiently effective to manage the behaviour of a child or young person, the carer is to notify as soon as practicable to the relevant agency to seek support or guidance from a behaviour support practitioner.

Can training and support be provided to carers or employees via online learning, skype or telephone?

Yes. Training does not necessarily need to be face-to-face and agencies may use a range of strategies to deliver training to carers and staff.

While online training may not meet the needs of all carers or employees, telephone support or informal online support groups may be helpful in reducing carers' and employees' sense of isolation and

provide opportunities for carers and employees to provide support and share strategies for responding to the challenges presented by the health emergency.

Agencies should document what training is provided to carers and employees and the mode of delivery.