



NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Supporting In-Person Visitation During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Guide for CP&P Staff, Families, Resource Parents and DCF-Contracted Visitation Providers October 13, 2021

Since March 2020, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) has made operational adjustments for its Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) practice in response to Governor Phil Murphy's declaration of a public health emergency and associated executive orders related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Guidance documents have been revised as necessary to best protect the health and safety of children, youth, families and staff, while aligning with the most current executive orders and recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and New Jersey Department of Health (DOH).¹

In April 2020, DCF temporarily suspended all in-person CP&P and provider-facilitated parent-child and sibling visitation, transitioning to remote technology to maintain contact. As the state broadly reopened during the course of the public health emergency, DCF reinstated in-person parent-child and sibling visitation on July 13, 2020.

This document provides updated guidance for CP&P staff, families, resource parents and DCF-contracted visitation providers regarding how to support in-person visitation while the COVID-19 state of emergency remains in place. It incorporates best practices from the CDC, DOH, other state agencies across the US, as well as feedback from stakeholder groups impacted by the return to in-person visitation. This document supersedes and replaces the following previously issued guidance and communication:

- Supporting In-Person Parent-Child and Sibling Visitation during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Guide for CP&P Staff and DCF-Contracted Visitation Providers, dated July 6, 2020
- Supporting In-Person Parent-Child and Sibling Visitation during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Guide for Families and CP&P Resource Parents, dated July 8, 2020
- In-Person Parent-Child and Sibling Visitation Tips during COVID-19

Public health officials continue to monitor COVID-19 and its variants and take steps to prevent the spread of the virus. Ongoing in-person visits are dependent upon New Jersey's continued safe management of the pandemic. Any changes to the guidance for in-person visits will be provided by DCF.

VISITATION, GENERALLY

CP&P and provider-facilitated parent-child and sibling visitation shall take place in-person. This requirement will only be relaxed when a medical professional deems in-person visitation to be inappropriate for a child or parent. If deemed inappropriate, video and telephone contact can be considered to supplement, but not replace in-person family visits, so that parents and children can have more frequent contact. Virtual visits are not considered a substitute for in-person visitation.

¹ https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>, <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/ncov.shtml>.

CP&P staff should use DCF's Parent-Child Visitation Planning Tool to determine recommendations for the family's visitation plan, including supervision level, visit location and visit frequency and duration.

ENSURING SAFETY AND HEALTH OF VISITATION PARTICIPANTS PRIOR TO, DURING AND AFTER VISITS

Ensuring the health and wellbeing of all visitation participants is critical. All visitation participants share equal responsibility for ensuring the health and safety of all participants. The following safety practices should be followed for all in-person visits to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and its variants:

- All visits supervised by CP&P or a provider should be limited to parents, caregivers, children, siblings, relatives and the supervisor of the visit. (Space permitting.)
- Visit participants should expect to be contacted prior to the visit to assess possible COVID-19 symptoms. Visit participants should contact CP&P or provider visitation staff (i.e., the receptionist) for instructions upon arrival and before entering the building, if applicable.
- Visit participants should adhere to use of face coverings and physical distancing as outlined below:
 - **Indoor activities, including visitation, taking place at DCF offices:** All staff and visitors, regardless of vaccination status, are to be masked, practice social distancing and are subject to screening. If an adult visitation participant refuses to or does not safely wear a face mask as required, the participant should be asked to leave the visit or the visit may be terminated for the health, safety and well-being of all visitation participants.
 - **Indoor visitation taking place at locations other than DCF offices:** CP&P staff, regardless of vaccination status, are required to wear a face mask when visiting clients in their homes, providers in out of home settings, and licensed entities. For visits taking place in other locations, DCF strongly encourages all adults and youth, regardless of vaccination status, to wear masks, practice social distancing, and to abide by additional safety protocols of the provider, if any. If a provider cancels a visit due to a participant's refusal to properly wear a face mask according to the provider's policy, they must notify CP&P immediately. CP&P staff should attempt to find an alternate location and supervise the visit, if possible.
 - **Outdoor visitation:** Vaccinated adults and youth are not required to mask or practice social distancing unless required by the venue. Unvaccinated individuals should be encouraged to wear a mask when social distancing is not an option. Outdoor parent-child visits should **not** be cancelled or terminated if any participant is unwilling to wear a mask.
 - DCF is encouraging all children over the age of 2 to wear a face mask. A face mask should not be worn by a child under 2, per CDC guidelines.
 - If a visit is terminated or a participant is asked to leave a visit as a result of a participant refusing to wear or not properly wearing a mask, CP&P staff will immediately notify a supervisor and follow protocols to provide court notification as needed. If there are concerns about CP&P and/or visitation providers following safety protocols, parents and/or resource parents may contact the CP&P caseworker's supervisor or resource supervisor.

These additional safety practices should be followed:

- Visitation participants should wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) prior to entering the visit location.
- If visitation participants show symptoms of COVID-19, they should contact their health care professional for medical guidance and testing information. Additionally, the participant should notify CP&P about COVID-19 symptoms, potential exposure, and positive COVID-19 test results as soon as possible

Cleaning and Disinfecting Visit Rooms in CP&P and Provider Offices

Toys and items that cannot be easily cleaned should be removed from visitation rooms. All visit rooms must be disinfected before and after each visit. Time permitting, the spray should be left to dry, but at a minimum all hard surfaces and frequently touched surfaces should be wiped down. Providers should follow manufacturer's instructions for sanitizing solutions. Visits should be spaced a minimum of 10 minutes apart to allow for cleaning and ventilation of rooms.

SAFELY TRANSPORTING CHILDREN AND/OR PARENTS TO/FROM VISITS

Anyone who is self-quarantining due to close contact with a COVID-19 positive individual, or self-isolating because of sickness, should NOT provide transportation to visits. Prior to entering vehicles for transportation, clients are subject to screening regarding symptoms.

Everyone must wash hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) prior to entering the vehicle.

All individuals, regardless of vaccination status, must be masked at all times when in a state vehicle. While in a provider agency vehicle, individuals must follow the provider agency's mask mandates. If a client being transported refuses to wear a mask, staff must seek further guidance from their supervisor.

Children and/or parents should be in the back seat furthest from the driver. Use of a van or large vehicle is preferred, if available. If the weather allows, windows should be opened slightly to support air flow. Avoid using the recirculated air option.

Individuals other than drivers and passengers should avoid touching the door handles, car seats, or vehicle's interior.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Vehicles

Vehicles must be cleaned and disinfected before and after each transport. Frequently touched surfaces in vehicles used to transport children should be cleaned and disinfected prior to and after each use. Surfaces include car keys, steering wheel, seatbelt buckles, seat covers, gear shifts, seat adjustment levers, windows, door handles, turn signals, vehicle dashboard, digital touchscreen, and other commonly-touched hard surfaces. Vehicles should be equipped with tissues and disposal receptacles. CP&P and provider staff should notify their supervisors if they transport anyone who exhibits the identified symptoms of COVID-19. The vehicle should be taken out of service and decontaminated, per CDC guidelines.

Additional information from the CDC is available here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/community/organizations/disinfecting-transport-vehicles.html>.