



March 20, 2020

RE: Update to Foster Caregivers on Face-to-Face Visitations during the Public Health Emergency

Dear Foster Caregivers,

We have no doubt that many of you have many questions on how COVID-19 and the declared public health emergency by the Chief Public Health Officer will impact your family and the children you care for.

We can assure you that the Department and Authorities are working hard to identify essential services necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and youth; and to support you as foster caregivers.

We are working with other jurisdictions, legal counsel and policy experts to make sure that our decisions are sound and in the best interest of children and youth. While we appreciate that all of you are anxiously waiting for what this means for your family and the children you care for, we must take a measured and thoughtful approach to sustain our system over the next several weeks to months.

As an immediate measure, we are suspending face to face visitations in all Regions other than in exceptional cases to ensure the safety and protection of children, families and caregivers. Exceptions include:

- Court Ordered Access to Parents - The Community Social Services Worker will check with legal counsel to clarify the specifics in the access plan to see if visitation can be suspended.
- Breastfeeding Mothers and Infant Bonding - Require regular and frequent access to maintain breastfeeding and ensure bonding for their child. The Community Social Services Worker will consult with public health/midwifery/nurse to develop a safety plan for parent-child contact. If the contact is not safe, alternatives will be explored to support the mother to continue to breastfeed without in person access.
- Reunification Plans - If there is a transition plan currently in place with a date set for the child to return home and there is no way to modify the plan without including in-person access.

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- Foster Home Investigations/Quality of Care Review - If a report or complaint is received about a foster home that requires immediate follow up, a plan will be developed to address the report/complaint in a timely manner to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children. This could involve contact in the home depending on the type of report/complaint.
- Follow Up to a Serious Occurrence- If there is a serious occurrence that happens with a child or youth in your home, follow-up could require in person contact with the child and/or family. Alternative methods of follow-up will be explored where possible.

In place of in-person contact, we will be organizing for electronic means of communication, such as telephone calls and video chats (skype, Facetime, etc.). To support this type of contact, phone minutes will be provided to foster caregivers, parents, children and youth, if required. We will also be supporting overages on data plans/internet based on the frequency of remote visitations. To ensure your information remains confidential when facilitating access to parents, we will cover fees to use call blocking features for foster caregivers.

We will continue to update you as we evolve our plans for Child and Family Services; especially in terms of what this means for you as foster caregivers. We are also working with the Foster Family Coalition of the NWT to help distribute information through their newsletter, website and their Facebook page.

Please contact your Foster Care Worker if you have any questions. You can also reach out to the Foster Family Coalition of the NWT at their toll free number at 1-866-233-0136.

We appreciate your co-operation and efforts to continue the tremendous work in supporting children and youth during this time.



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