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SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS OCFS RESPONDS TO RAPIDLY CHANGING ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Dear Resource Families,

The OCFS Executive Management Team has been developing guidance related to the Coronavirus as we face this challenge as local, national and international communities. It is of the utmost importance to ensure the health and well-being of staff, community partners, resource parents, families and children as we continue to provide services and support to youth and families in the State of Maine.

There are several areas that may impact you as a resource family and we will continue to update you regarding information and decisions as advised by the CDC and our Governor.

If we do not have your email address, please provide it to your Community Care Licensing worker as soon as possible, so that we may update you as information becomes available.

Visitation:

As a precaution and to ensure the safety of our staff and families, OCFS will be suspending all in person visits for the next two weeks, at which time the protocol will be reviewed. This includes family visitation at DHHS offices, visits arranged by resource parents and those held at contracted visitation agencies. To ensure that youth and families remain connected, it is expected that staff will coordinate contact to occur through phone calls and video conferencing. Supervision will be provided by resource parents, case aides or agency staff. The duration of calls or video conferences will depend on the age/ability of the children – for example, a 15-minute call or video conference with an infant to check in with the resource parent and observe the infant may be appropriate while a longer call or video conference may be needed for older children or youth.

For mothers who may be breastfeeding, we will request that they pump and coordinate for the breast milk to be provided to the resource parent for the child, adhering to health and wellbeing guidelines.

Any visitation that is currently supervised by resource parents should be directed to the caseworker and must be approved in advance and coordinated to ensure the health and safety of children and others involved in the visit. We are encouraging social distancing and any visitation that takes place should use precautions and keep children home when they are very sick and/or have a fever. However, when preparing for a visit, please ask the following three questions in order to determine whether the visits should take place.

Does the person with whom the child will visit have any of the following symptoms?

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

If so, please do not provide the scheduled contact/visit and contact OCFS.

Monthly Face-to-Face Contacts:

At this time, OCFS will be suspending all in person face-to face monthly visits through the end of April, at which time the protocol will be reviewed. To ensure that OCFS is remaining connected to youth, parents, and resource parents, it is expected that staff will coordinate contact to occur through phone calls or video conferencing for any families that need to be seen by the end of April 2020. Calls from staff may come through to you from different phone numbers as it is possible, they will be working remotely. Please answer unknown numbers at this time or check voicemail frequently.

Medical Appointments for Children in Foster Care:

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak the following changes have been made to required and recommended medical appointments for children in DHHS custody:

- It is important that resource parents identify the Primary Care Providers (PCP) for foster children placed in their homes. If a child is ill, or you have concerns, call the office of the PCP with any questions, and you will be guided whether to have the child come to the office, go to the ED, or to monitor the child from home.
- If a foster child in your home is a newborn or young infant, or the child has any medical issues, the child should be seen as recommended by the medical provider who is caring for the infant.
- Due to the announcement by the Governor declaring a civil state of emergency and to avoid non-essential visits to medical offices, we are requesting a waiver from the Governor regarding the medical appointment that is required within 10 days of a child entering DHHS custody.
- If there are any medical concerns or the child is a newborn infant, call the provider's office for an appointment to address your concerns.
- In regard to scheduling comprehensive health assessment at the PREP and Key Clinics (PCHC, Maine General and Spurwink), OCFS staff will continue to make referrals, although in person visits will be postponed through the end of April, at which the protocol will be reviewed as more guidance is available. The PREP and Key Clinic staff will contact resource families to check in and address any urgent medical or mental health needs.

Court:

Assistant Attorneys General (AAGs) will be working with the judges locally to try to minimize in-person court appearances. Some will still be necessary, and caseworkers will need to contact you if your testimony is needed or you are otherwise required to be at court.

Youth in College:

If you have a young adult on a V9 returning to your home from college and need assistance with food or board, please contact your youth transition worker.

RFIT Training:

OCFS will be suspending Resource Parent Training through the end of April 2020. OCFS will re-assess and provide updates of any changes as they are implemented to ensure training is provided for licensure. For current Resource Parent applicants, OCFS will be waiving the requirement to complete the RFIT training prior to licensure, until such time as the training is available. The new expectation will be for this training to be completed within 6 months of the date of licensure.

Childcare:

OCFS staff will do everything possible to assist resource parents in identifying alternative sources of child care as schools and childcare programs close. We would also encourage resource parents to utilize their own supports whenever possible.

How to Talk to Children about COVID-19:

Below are resources to assist OCFS staff in talking to children and youth in care about what is happening and to help them understand why OCFS is taking certain steps. It is important to help children and youth understand that this is serious, while not causing them to be afraid.

- Talking about Disease in the News (Bradley Hospital): https://www.bradleyhospital.org/talking-about-diseases-news
- How to Talk to Kids about Coronavirus (PBS): https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-coronavirus
- How to Talk to Kids about Coronavirus (NY Times): https://parenting.nytimes.com/childrens-health/coronavirus-kids-talk

Thank you all for the care that you provide to our most vulnerable children of Maine. Please contact your caseworker or licensing worker with questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW

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