



Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: March 19, 2020

SNAP/TANF

Q1. Will TANF work participation and other requirements be relaxed in light of the recommended social distancing measures?

A. Not at this time for TANF. However, we understand your concerns. All states are faced with this issue, and the Governor has expressed his intention to seek broad flexibility at the federal level during this time. We are working with the administration on this and will provide updates as they come.

Q2. Is ODJFS taking steps to help food-insecure and homeless individuals – for example, by paying for food delivery for SNAP recipients?

A. At the moment, federal rules prohibit online grocery shopping, although USDA is conducting a pilot in other states.

Q3. Is there any talk of suspending SNAP recertifications or interim reports, to reduce county call volume during times of staff reduction?

A. *Update:* ODJFS is submitting waiver requests to FNS regarding various requirements, including recertifications, reporting requirements, and verifications. Until waivers are approved, current rules and guidance apply.

Q4. Indiana has temporarily waived the State Plan requirement that prohibits pre-packaging/pre-bagging of TEFAP commodities. Is Ohio going to follow suit?

A. Ohio already allows the pre-packaging of TEFAP commodities. We encourage choice model pantries to eliminate waste, but we don't specifically restrict this option. A waiver is not necessary for this in Ohio.

Update: Ohio also will now allow self-attestation for identity and income and verbal consent instead of a signature. The foodbanks/pantries will be required to note on the application "COVID-19 2020." At this time, ODJFS is maintaining the 200% FPL income requirement. However, as additional funds are identified the income level will continue to be evaluated.

Q5. What if county workers work from home and have no access to the state system to get the RMS notifications. Will that be an issue?

A. The RMS system is web-based so if they have access to their email to see that they have a notification, then they should be able to go into the system and complete the notification. If they can't access their email or the system, then the county RMS

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coordinator can complete the “hit” for the worker. However, they would have to contact the worker at home to see what they were working on.

Q6. Will there be any kind of RMS accommodation if agencies shut down or have many people out sick?

A. At this time, we do not anticipate that an accommodation would be necessary. We over-sample during a quarter as a standard practice. However, we will monitor this as we go forward.

Q7. Will ODJFS consider providing a one-time TANF supplement for foster and kinship parents, TANF child-only cases, and food assistance groups with children in the household?

A. We are exploring that recommendation.

Update: To ensure county agencies can address local needs, we are going to utilize the \$10 million that was allocated for TANF Summer Youth Employment and broaden the scope of services for which it can be utilized. ODJFS will allocate the \$10 million to all county agencies as soon as possible. The funds can be used for TANF Summer Youth Employment AND/OR any other Prevention, Retention, and Contingency service deemed necessary. Examples: County agencies could provide a COVID-19 2020 Response payment or a payment to eligible families to help them prepare for self-quarantine and social distancing. The funding will be made available on March 20. Family Assistance Letter #183-A will provide additional guidance.

Q8. Because of school closures and the May 1 start date for the TANF Summer Youth Employment Program, some counties may have difficulty recruiting youth to participate. Recruitment also would require additional meetings between the local agencies, participants and the employers. Would ODJFS considering permitting counties to redirect these TANF funds to services and supports related to alleviating burdens on families/caregivers as a result of school closure.

A. County agencies may amend their PRC plans now to provide additional supports. See the response to Q7.

Q9. If resources are available, can a one-time supplement be provided to all SNAP recipients?

A. Federal legislation is currently pending and contains a provision for SNAP supplements. We are also looking into other possible pandemic funding.

Q10. Can the state extend hours of operation for Ohio Benefits and EDMS? With many staff affected by schools being out, some counties are exploring offering weekend/evening hours to help with child care duties?

A. Ohio Benefits and EDMS are both available 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. 7 days per week.

Update: We are exploring extended hours of operation. Utilizing Ohio Benefits, the state is working on new approaches to help Ohio’s 88 counties prepare by:

- **Enabling county workers to handle inbound and outbound County Shared Services calls for their group or metro area from any remote location.** For

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county workers who already have a Surface Pro or laptop and a phone, the state is working to provide them with the capability to work remotely. The state also is attempting to secure additional hardware, as well as identifying other viable options.

- **Establishing a round-robin Statewide Hub for routing calls from groups or metros significantly impacted by COVID-19.** The state is working to establish a new set of round-robin call queues to handle calls from affected groups or metros across Ohio. However, counties will not be guaranteed to receive and work cases from their county, group or metro. Affected counties without SNAP/TANF queues can have queues established and can utilize either their own queue, the statewide hub, or their normal business processes. Affected counties with local long-term care (LTC) contact centers can re-route their LTC calls to the enterprise call center number to be handled in the CSS Medicaid queues.
- **Providing remote access to other solutions, such as Interactive Voice Response (IVR), EDMS, and Ohio Benefits.**

As these efforts are finalized in the next week, more information will be shared, and we will work with counties to gather the necessary data to allow them to participate in and take advantage of these new capabilities.

Q11. Could SNAP recipients be allowed to use their EBT cards for non-allowable items, such as cleaning supplies, and at currently prohibited locations such as restaurants and food delivery services?

A. We continue to explore all options but have not received guidance from FNS on this. At the moment, federal rules prohibit online grocery shopping, and federal rules do not allow for non-food items. PRC funds could be deployed for this purpose.

Q12. Is anything being done to provide more help to Ohioans through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program?

A. Ohio is using an automated system to order food more quickly. Clients do not have to touch paper or sign an application form; they can verbally agree to the program's eligibility requirements. ODJFS will maintain the annual assessment and require signature only at reauthorization. Monthly pick-up confirmation can be noted by the distributing entity.

Q13. Will the ABAWD waiver still take effect?

A. Late on March 13, we received notification that there was an injunction on the April 1, 2020, ABAWD waiver changes. The state is working to ensure that Ohio-waived counties are identified correctly in Ohio Benefits as they were before the April 2020 changes. We started the update process that night, prior to the injunction. We immediately worked with the vendor to stop the process and change the counties back to waived.

We want to remind counties of flexibility articulated in the recent FNS guidance regarding how to determine whether a good cause exists for a SNAP Employment and Training or ABAWD participant to be exempted from work requirements:

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“...whether it is appropriate to determine that circumstances beyond the individual’s control provide good cause for the individual to not meet the work requirements. Applying good cause would allow households that do not meet the ABAWD work requirements or mandatory employment and training (E&T) requirements to continue receiving SNAP benefits.”

Workforce

Q1. Could the state please consider allowing OWF applicants/CCMEP participants in some counties to be referred to their OhioMeansJobs centers or other county JFS agencies for the CCMEP application, assessment, and IOP signing, to complete the eligibility requirements for cash assistance? Currently, OWF cash eligibility requirements are not met until the CCMEP IOP is signed for TANF work-eligible individuals under the age of 24.

A. ODJFS is reviewing possible alternatives, but at this time the eligibility requirements have not changed. We will provide updates as they come.

Q2. Could the state please consider waiving CCMEP and the TANF work participation requirements attached to the program during the state of emergency, to ensure that customers are not driven to many different case management staff and to delay any adverse action?

A. We understand your concerns. All states are faced with this issue, and the Governor has expressed his intention to seek broad flexibility at the federal level during this time. We are working with the administration on this and will provide updates as they come.

Q3. When work-eligible applicants under age 24 apply for OWF cash assistance, could the state consider approving them if all other eligibility requirements are met? Referrals to CCMEP case managers could be made at redetermination or at a later date, as determined by ODJFS.

A. ODJFS is reviewing possible alternatives, but at this time the eligibility requirements have not changed. We will provide updates as they come.

Q4. At some point, can ODJFS communicate plans to address the high volume of unemployment claims and related activity that is likely to occur?

A. We are actively working on a plan. This week, we are moving 20 employees from our Office of Workforce Development’s Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment program to assist with unemployment calls. We also are prioritizing our existing staff, and those who can be transitioned to claims intake and processing are being moved to those functions. We will continue this effort as the necessary technology becomes available.

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Q5. Can ODJFS explore waiving the requirements for unemployment claimants to register with OhioMeansJobs.com within two weeks of filing an initial claim? This may help reduce traffic at the OhioMeansJobs centers.

A. We actually encourage as many employment services as possible to be completed through [OhioMeansJobs.com](https://ohioMeansJobs.com) to reduce in-person traffic at the OhioMeansJobs centers, as part of the social-distancing efforts.

Q6. If employees must be laid off because of social distancing measures such as office closures and if remote work is not an option for them, will they be eligible for unemployment compensation?

A. An executive order issued by Governor DeWine expands flexibility for Ohioans to receive unemployment benefits during Ohio's emergency declaration period. Unemployment benefits will be available for eligible individuals who are requested by a medical professional, local health authority, or employer to be isolated or quarantined as a consequence of COVID-19, even if they are not actually diagnosed with COVID-19. In addition, the waiting period for eligible Ohioans to receive unemployment benefits will be waived.

Q7. What exactly does the Governor's executive order regarding unemployment authorize?

A. Essentially, the order broadens state policy to clarify that individuals who are quarantined are considered to be unemployed. This also applies to companies that determine they need to temporarily shut down. The order also waives the one-week waiting period normally required before receipt of benefits. We don't want to penalize employers by increasing their future taxes so the cost of the benefits will be mutualized over time, and we will waive penalties for late filing and payment for the duration of the emergency.

Q8. How can Ohioans apply for unemployment benefits?

A. Ohioans can file online 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at unemployment.ohio.gov. We encourage people to file online, if possible. However, they also may file by phone at (877) OHIO-JOB (1-877-644-6562) or TTY at (888) 642-8203, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m..

Child Care

Q1. If a school is closed due to the virus, can child care providers use the "school out of session" attendance designation in the Time, Attendance, and Payment system? Can county agencies adjust the maximum number of hours of a child's PFCC authorization?

A. Yes, providers can use the "school out of session" designation if this occurs. However, families – not programs – should contact the county agency about making any changes to their authorizations.

Update: An executive order increased the number of children allowed to be supervised by child care staff, depending on the type of program and ages of the children. The order also increased from 10 to 20 the number of paid absent days for providers serving

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children in the Publicly Funded Child Care program, and it provides child care programs with 21 paid pandemic days if they must close their programs because of the pandemic.

Q2. Will children be allowed more PFCC absent days if they are quarantined? Will programs receive some type of reimbursement if a town is quarantined and they cannot operate?

A. We continue to explore options to assist in these circumstances.

Update: An executive order increased from 10 to 20 the number of paid absent days for providers serving children in the Publicly Funded Child Care program, and it provides child care programs with 21 paid pandemic days if they must close their programs because of the pandemic.

Q3. Can organizations that provide training to child care providers offer that training online or via videoconference instead of in person? If not, could the training be delayed?

A. Child Care already allows online training for most courses, with the exception of CPR training.

Q4. What bleach water guidelines should child care programs follow? ODJFS's or the CDCs? The ODJFS recommendation is 1/4 cup of bleach and 1 gallon of water for a strong bleach solution and 1 tablespoon bleach and 1 gallon of water for a weak bleach solution. The CDC recommendation is 1/3 cup bleach and 1 gallon of water for a strong bleach solution and 4 teaspoons of bleach and 1 gallon of water a weak bleach solution.

A. The Ohio Administrative Code states that providers must use a commercial product registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a sanitizer and to follow the manufacturer's instructions. Providers following the CDC guidance would be considered in compliance with the Ohio Administrative Code.

Q5. Because of school closures, can the limits for the number of children that child care providers, particularly Type B providers, are allowed to care for be temporarily waived or increased? Would ODJFS consider increasing the ratio/group size requirements by 20% until the workforce can be stabilized?

A. Yes. New rules took effect March 13, relaxing staff-to-child ratios at child care programs. Child care centers must continue following their maximum capacity indicated on the license.

Q6. Will ODJFS consider a six-month automatic extension of eligibility for PFCC benefits?

A. We continue to explore all options.

Q7. Will ODJFS consider providing payments for up to 21 catastrophe days in the case of COVID-19-related closures (similar to holidays and professional development days)?

A. Governor DeWine's recent executive order provides programs with 21 paid pandemic days if they must close because of the pandemic.

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Q8. Will ODJFS consider a six-month extension of the SUTQ deadline?

A. We continue to explore all options.

***New:* Q9. Will front-line county agency and workforce staff be considered “essential employees” and able to use the emergency child care centers?**

A. We are working to manage these requests and hope to have answers soon.

New: For up-to-date COVID-10-related child care information, please visit jfs.ohio.gov/childcare.

Child and Adult Protective Services

Q1. Will information be provided for foster parents, child care providers, or other substitute caregivers?

A. We encourage you to remind foster parents, child care providers, and other substitute caregivers to visit coronavirus.ohio.gov for up-to-date information and more specific guidance. They also can call the Ohio Department of Health hotline at 1-833-4-ASK-ODH (1-833-427-5634) 7 days a week from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. In addition, please see the attached guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Children’s Bureau.

Q2. Will visitation protocols be changed for child and adult protective services?

Update: On March 18, Dr. Jerry Milner, associate commissioner of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Children’s Bureau, provided practice guidance to states. Here are some highlights:

- **Caseworker Visits:** The monthly caseworker visit requirement remains in place, but ACF is modifying its policy to permit visits to be conducted by videoconferencing in these current extraordinary circumstances.
- **Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plans:** States and ACF may jointly renegotiate the terms and conditions of the PIP in accordance with the requirements of 45 CFR 1355.35(e)(4). Ohio will be asking for an extension.
- **Other Legislative and Regulatory Flexibility:** Although periodic reviews and permanency hearings are important protections for children in foster care, ACF has explained that the case review requirements are not a Title IV-E eligibility requirement. Therefore, delays in conducting these activities will not adversely affect a child’s eligibility for title IV-E.

This guidance pertains to both public and private entities. ODJFS recommends documenting any of the above actions that are contrary to current rule in the SACWIS Activity Log as relative to COVID-19. For more information, visit https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/covid-19-resources?utm_campaign=covid19&utm_medium=email&utm_source=covid19031920

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We have heard of some residential centers already limiting visitors and offering telecommunication options. For example, one facility has communicated that they are taking extra precautions for caseworker visits and requiring all visits to be scheduled in advance. That facility has provided the following guidance:

- *Caseworkers will also have to be checked in by our nursing department before visiting your client. They will be checking and asking the following questions:*
 - *Temperature greater than or equal to 100.4 (WE WILL CHECK YOUR TEMP)*
 - *Cough*
 - *Shortness of Breath*
 - *Runny Nose*
 - *Any Recent Travel out of state/ country*
- *If you are found to have any of these symptoms, please follow your agencies guidelines to send another representative in your place.*
- *We have designated areas to accommodate your visits.*
- *We apologize for the any inconvenience and thank you for your cooperation in keeping our client's health and well-being a priority.*

Q3. Are there any alternatives or waivers that county PCSAs can invoke regarding out-of-state visits, particularly those that involve staff flying to another state?

A. When an Ohio PCSA (or PCPA) places a child in an out-of-state placement, those placements must go through the ICPC approval process. The ICPC requires authorities at either the local agency (if the child was placed in a foster home) or residential facility in the state in which the child was placed to conduct the monitoring/visiting. There is no requirement for Ohio PCSA staff to travel to other states to personally conduct monitoring, visits, or face-to-face contact with children placed out-of-state. Although many PCSAs continue to conduct their own visitation and monitoring of children out of state as a best practice, that is not required. (MM)

Q4. In light of the crisis, can the rules for the Kinship Child Care Program and PRC programs be loosened so that counties would have the discretion to use their PRC and kinship programs to address caregivers' emergent needs, such as access to food, child care, and other basic needs.

A. To ensure county agencies can address local needs, we are going to utilize the \$10 million that was allocated for TANF Summer Youth Employment and broaden the scope of services for which it can be utilized. ODJFS will allocate the \$10 million to all county agencies as soon as possible. The funds can be used for TANF Summer Youth Employment AND/OR any other Prevention, Retention, and Contingency service deemed necessary. Examples: County agencies could provide a COVID 2020 payment or a payment to eligible families to help them prepare for self-quarantine and social distancing.

Q5. Are there any special protections county APS workers should take to help prevent the potential spread to vulnerable adults who are potential victims of elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation? Should special protective gear (i.e. masks, gowns) be

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considered? Is ODJFS able to work with ODH on recommendations or should counties consult with their local health departments? Additionally, counties would likely need access to the necessary health supplies, and most retail establishments are currently sold out. Any assistance in securing these items would be appreciated.

A. At this time, we are exploring all options. We also have provided guidance to county APS staff to help them prepare for and conduct home visits. (See attached.) In addition, we encourage county agencies and local workforce development boards to work closely with their county health departments. For local contact information, visit <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/find-local-health-districts>.

Q6. What should caseworkers do if a family is referred to an agency and has someone in the home who is sick with the virus? During the initial call, can caseworkers ask if anyone in the house is exhibiting symptoms? Can county agencies get guidance from the health department about in-home visits?

A. Please see the attached home visit flow chart that ODJFS provided to county agencies.

Q7. What should county agencies do if staff contract COVID-19? What if staff can't come to work due to child care issues related to school closures? Can we allow staff to work from home? If so, under what circumstances?

A. Staff who are ill should not report to work. County agencies should use their own executive-level discretion to make these decisions and adjust caseworker activities as necessary on a case-by-case basis and document those decisions.

Q8. Can training for new workers and foster parents be suspended? What if a foster parent's license is about to lapse?

A. We are exploring whether training for new workers and foster parents can be suspended. For foster parents whose certificate is about to lapse, each agency should follow their a good cause policy (5101:2-5-13) regarding a foster caregiver's failure to complete the required training hours. The policy must include what constitutes a good cause, including a documented illness, critical emergencies, and lack of accessible training programs. It must also include procedures for developing a scheduled corrective action plan. If the foster caregiver complies with the policy, ODJFS may renew the certificate. If an agency has questions about its policy or regarding a specific situation, they should contact their foster care licensing specialist.

Q9. What is ODJFS doing to help emancipated young adults affected by college and university closures?

A. We have reached out to the colleges to confirm that housing is still available to any student who does not have alternative housing. We are working with our Bridges vendor and regional teams to help youth in the program who have housing and other needs. We have reached out to PCSAs regarding post-emancipation services and supports. We also have been in close contact with Foster Care to Success. They are reaching out to students individually and report that all young adults contacted currently have a place to go. Another concern is wage loss for students with campus jobs. We are exploring whether the affected youth might be eligible for CCMEP.

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Q10: In light of the social distancing recommendations, are licensed adoption assessors able to conduct post-placement visits via video to best protect children, families, and staff from potential exposure?

A: Agencies should make these decisions on a case-by-case basis after assessing immediate health and safety concerns. If the child is assessed to be safe in the adoptive home, the agency may consider reduced visits or alternatives to in-person visits, for example by using video technology. Agencies are encouraged to contact the probate court that will finalize the adoption to discuss any alternative visitation plan and its impact on finalization.

Child Support

Q1. Would it be possible to extend the hours of SETS access? Many county employees are challenged by school closures and may need to adjust their schedules.

A. *Update:* SETS is now available 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. Please note that special maintenance or jobs may limit some Saturday hours, but notice will be provided in advance.

General Information

Q1. Is there information available about how best to disinfect a public facility?

A. Yes. You can find guidance on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html>.

Q2. Will the state provide funding for cleaning and sanitation supplies, or purchase bulk quantities of supplies that could be distributed to counties?

A. At this point no, but we may consider doing so in the future.

Q3. Do public meeting laws allow virtual meetings to be held in place of in-person meetings?

A. To the extent that you have the flexibility to meet virtually, we encourage you to do that and follow Governor DeWine's lead in undertaking reasonable social distancing measures for the next several weeks. Postpone large in-person meetings if you can, and encourage employees to maximize use of phone conferences, videoconferences, webinars, and email to conduct business as much as possible.

Update: Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost held a press conference on this issue. He stated that while open meeting requirements are not waived, in-person attendance by the public is not required and that meetings may be conducted by electronic means, as long as the public is notified and can participate.

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Q4. If state staff are stationed in a non-state-owned building that closes because of the coronavirus, where should they report for work?

A. The department has a Continuity of Operations Plan that determines where state employees should report for work in the event of facility closures. We will ensure all staff know their alternate work locations.

Q5. Is the Ohio Department of Health sharing information with county health departments?

A. Yes, they are. We encourage county agencies and local workforce development boards to work closely with their county health departments. For local contact information, visit <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/find-local-health-districts>.

Q6. Can the state help with technology to allow county staff to work from home, if needed?

A. *Update:* To assist counties with some of the basics regarding technology, we built a knowledge base that is accessible on SharePoint. It includes Surface Pro basics, information about Skype, VPN set up, and other helpful tips. We will continue to add updates to this site as needs arise. Counties can access it on the County Operations User Experience (UX) Portal.

In addition, ODJFS is allowing state-issued mobile devices and desktop personal computers (PCs or towers) to be taken home to perform job functions. This will support county staff to telework as appropriate. This includes the personal computer, tower, monitor, keyboard and other peripherals needed to perform job functions. Please note, the desktop PCs do not have the capability of connecting to a wireless network and will be required to connect directly to the employee's internet outlet with the patch cable currently utilized to connect to the desktop PC at the workstation. For more information, please see the memo that was sent to local directors on March 17.

Note that certain applications will not be accessible without Virtual Private Network (VPN) access, regardless of whether you have a Surface Pro, tablet, or desktop computer. County operations staff will be working with TPOCs to identify those in need of VPN access

Q7. Can the call tree for counties with shared services be amended to include an initial message asking clients to continue to utilize the phone and online systems, even if the wait times might be longer than usual, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure in county agency lobbies?

A. Yes, the tech team is working on this now. It will be in English and Spanish.

***New:* Q8. Has ODJFS considered temporarily suspending or state hearings for cases in which people are already getting benefits, to help counties focus on mission-critical activities.**

A. The Bureau of State Hearings intends to continue the business of state hearings is considering all options in prioritizing scheduling. We recognize that counties are struggling to maintain staff levels and complete essential duties. We will be flexible and work with counties to schedule a reasonable number of hearings that will allow us to

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continue to process appeals but also not overwhelm county agencies. County agencies should reach out to Bureau of State Hearings to discuss any scheduling concerns.

New: Q9. Can ODJFS provide assistance with telephones for remote workers?

A. Under Ohio's state-supervised county-administered operating model, county entities are the provider for telephone technology. When considering how to adapt a work-from-home strategy for phone calls, it is recommended that counties consult their internal IT expertise or their telephone providers for best-fit solutions to best match work-from-home scenarios. The most simplistic guidance for all phones is to forward all calls from the desk phone to the end-user home phone or mobile phone. Some phone solutions have technology called "follow me" calling, which may be offered by some phone providers. This technology can deliver calls to desktop phone devices regardless of their network presence on or off the ODJFS network. Please consult your phone provider to see if this service is available.

Cisco Finesse users and shared service users will require a VPN token for Finesse functions to work successfully. We are exploring technologies that incorporate Soft Phone clients that will work in conjunction with Finesse to enable calls without a handset. However, at this time the solution is still being reviewed and engineered before we can declare this option as a feasible alternative.

For up-to-date information about COVID-19, visit coronavirus.ohio.gov or call the Ohio Department of Health hotline at 1-833-4-ASK-ODH (1-833-427-5634).