



ODJFS Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response
Frequently Asked Questions
Updated: March 25, 2020

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SNAP/TANF

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

A. *Update:* HHS-ACF has released the following guidance: “We are facing a national public health and economic emergency of unprecedented proportions. We want grantees to keep their focus on addressing the crisis and protecting the health and safety of the people they serve and the public at large. To help states and tribes do this, we have looked closely at our authority to grant reasonable cause exceptions to grantees that face a penalty for failing the FY 2020 work participation rates due to the COVID-19 emergency. A reasonable cause exception means the grantee would not face a financial penalty. While ACF has no authority to waive the work participation rate requirement itself, it does have authority to grant relief from the resulting penalty in the face of natural disasters and other calamities. ACF will exercise this authority to the maximum extent possible. For more information, grantees should refer to 45 CFR §§ 262.5 and 286.225 for the regulations on reasonable cause applicable to states and tribes, respectively.”

ACF also said that it is not expanding or changing what counts for work participation during the pandemic. They suggest providing online approaches for participants to engage in work activities virtually, such as online trainings and job search and work readiness activities to keep them engaged without needing to go to a training site. Additionally, good cause should be granted to participants who cannot go to work or training activities because, for example, they are ill, caring for a child whose school or day care is closed due to the pandemic, or because the work or training site is closed.

Please note that any potential reasonable cause relief would likely be applied only to months during the COVID-19 emergency, not the entire federal fiscal year 2020.

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.

Update: SNAP recipients can call ahead and have the retailer (grocery store) gather their requested items if the retailer does not require payment at the time of ordering. They can then drive to the store, pick up their groceries, and pay onsite with their EBT card. Retailers can submit a waiver to request to have a mobile POS device in order to carry groceries to SNAP recipients’ cars. As of December 2019, only Kroger had requested this waiver in Ohio. We are uncertain whether they have operationalized this yet. Retailers work directly with FNS for this waiver, not through ODJFS.

In addition, the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act, signed into law on March 18, provides supplemental funding and/or flexibilities for several food assistance programs, including funding for foodbanks and emergency SNAP assistance for households with children who are missing free or reduced-price meals at school because of coronavirus-related school closings. More information will be forthcoming.

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

A. 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.

Update: ODJFS has been approved to extend recertifications due in March, April, and May 2020 for six months. We also have been approved to adjust the interim report due dates for March, April, and May 2020. For additional information, see the Food Action Change Transmittal No. 66, which was made available in [eManuals](#) on March 24.

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.

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 staff working from home have no access to the state system to get the RMS notifications?

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 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.

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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. In addition, 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. One example: County agencies could provide a COVID-19 2020 Response payment to eligible families. The funding was made available on March 20. Family Assistance Letter #183-A provides 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, above.

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 also are looking into other possible pandemic funding.

Update: The federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act, signed into law on March 18, provides supplemental funding and/or flexibilities for several food assistance programs, including funding for foodbanks and emergency SNAP assistance for households with children who are missing free or reduced-price meals at school because of coronavirus-related school closings. The federal legislation requires states to submit a waiver request for additional benefits. ODJFS is seeking a waiver for additional benefits.

Q10. Can the state extend hours of operation for Ohio Benefits and EDMS?.

A. Update: Beginning Monday, March 23, Ohio Benefits, EDMS, and the IVR will be available 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily.

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 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.

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- **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 IVR, EDMS, and Ohio Benefits.**

As these efforts are finalized, 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:

“...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.”

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Update: The federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act, signed into law on March 18, suspends federal work and work training requirements for SNAP during the period of a public health emergency declaration, beginning the first full month after the bill is enacted and terminated at the end of the first full month after the declaration is lifted. Receipt of SNAP benefits during the health emergency would not be counted toward time limits.

In addition, states that have issued an emergency or disaster declaration for COVID-19 may receive emergency allotments for SNAP households, up to the maximum monthly allotment. Issuance methods and application and reporting requirements may be adjusted. USDA must make state requests and USDA responses, as well as any guidance on state flexibilities, publicly available online. More information will be forthcoming.

New: Q14. Will ODJFS be issuing guidance on changes to verification requirements for SNAP?

A. In consultation with the ODJFS Office of Fiscal and Monitoring Services, the Office of Family Assistance is providing the following guidance within the parameters of current federal rules in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

County agencies should maximize the use of verifications through online databases/interfaces, and third-party electronic data (i.e., The Work Number). When this documentary evidence is unavailable, the county agency should attempt a collateral contact. In order to sustain a QC review and be re-verified, journal notes would need to contain specific details about the collateral contact, including date and time of contact, name of person the case worker spoke to, phone number, and information given. For example, “Spoke with Landlord, [insert name of landlord] on March 16, 2020 at 2 p.m. [insert landlord name], [insert phone number] confirmed rent in the amount of \$500 for the [insert name] family for the duration of the lease, which ends June 30, 2020.”

Lastly, when collateral contact verification is unavailable, a county agency may accept a client statement. When using a client statement, journal notes will need to reflect that documentary and collateral contacts were unavailable.

Further, FNS recently issued a policy clarification regarding the use of income and employment information from third-party payroll sources, such as The Work Number. For employment reported by the household, county agencies may use the information obtained through The Work Number without further verification if it matches the household’s statement and is not questionable. If questionable, county agencies should attempt a collateral contact. If the collateral contact is unsuccessful, county agencies can accept a client statement.

New: Q15. Will ODJFS be issuing guidance on changes to verification requirements for SNAP?

A. A communication was sent on March 23. We will continue to communicate as other approvals come in.

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New: Q16. Will the message about SNAP recertifications be recorded on the statewide IVR?

A. Yes, we worked with the vendor to get the message uploaded by March 24.

New: Q17. When will the SNAP recertification waivers be approved so we can stop taking those calls on Shared Services?

A. We worked with the vendor to get the message uploaded by March 24.

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. **Update:** Yes. We have received a record number of initial jobless claims – the most in one month since the early '80s – and also a high volume of calls. This unprecedented surge has resulted in slow processing times due to high claims activity. As a result, we have been working hard to add capacity and address performance issues. We also have transitioned many staff to claims intake, processing, and customer service, including many employees from our Office of Workforce Development.

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Last week, we emailed all county agency and workforce directors a [“How to Help Unemployment Claimants”](#) document, and we are grateful for all offers of help that we have received.

We also created a single mass-layoff number – 2000180 – to speed application processing for Ohioans who were laid off as a result of COVID-19. Claimants can apply without this number, but they may receive notices that they are required to seek work. In fact, COVID-affected claimants are not required to seek work. We are advising them to ignore these notices; their benefits will not be impacted if they do not seek work.

Finally, we post frequent system updates and tips for claimants on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Q5. Can ODJFS explore waiving the requirements for unemployment claimants to register with OhioMeansJobs.com within two weeks of filing an initial claim?

A. *Update:* This requirement has been waived.

Q6. If employees are laid off as a result of COVID-19 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, those without internet access or who need assistance 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. **Update:** Starting on Thursday, March 26, through at least April 30, all operating child care centers in Ohio must have temporary pandemic child care licenses. Licenses can be issued to child care centers, family child care homes, and certified in-home aides. Approved providers are listed at jfs.ohio.gov/cdc, under the “Family Pandemic Child Care Information” button. We also now have a button on this page for child care providers.

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. **Update:** Starting on Thursday, March 26, through at least April 30, all operating child care programs in Ohio must have temporary pandemic child care licenses. Approved providers are listed at jfs.ohio.gov/cdc, under the “Family Pandemic Child Care Information” button. We also now have a button on this page for child care providers.

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? 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 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 are allowed to care for be temporarily waived or increased?

A. **Update:** Starting on Thursday, March 26, through at least April 30, all operating child care programs in Ohio must have temporary pandemic child care licenses. Approved providers are listed at jfs.ohio.gov/cdc, under the “Family Pandemic Child Care Information” button. We also now have a button on this page for child care providers. The pandemic child care licenses allow no more than six children to a space at any given time. Family child care home providers can care for no more than three children under age 2.

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. **Update:** Starting on Thursday, March 26, through at least April 30, all operating child care programs in Ohio must have temporary pandemic child care licenses. Approved providers are listed at jfs.ohio.gov/cdc, under the “Family Pandemic Child Care Information” button. We also now have a button on this page for child care providers.

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

A. We continue to explore all options.

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

A. **Update:** The following professionals without alternate care are being prioritized for enrollment in pandemic child care programs:

1. Hospital and clinic staff
2. Dentists
3. Pharmacy staff
4. Nursing home, elder care, and home health care workers
5. Psychologists
6. Psychiatrists
7. Mental health counselors
8. Developmental disability aides
9. First responders (police, fire, and EMT)
10. Direct service workers, including child care, children services, public assistance, and adult protective services professionals.

Note that the pandemic child care programs are available only for essential employees who are not working from home. For more information, please see the “Pandemic Child Care Information” buttons for families and providers at jfs.ohio.gov/cdc.

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 this [Message on COVID-19 from the Children's Bureau](#).

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

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, please see this [Message on COVID-19 from the Children's Bureau](#).

Prior to the [Stay at Home Order](#), some residential centers were already limiting visitors and offering telecommunication options. For example, one facility communicated that they were taking extra precautions for caseworker visits and requiring all visits to be scheduled in advance. That facility 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*

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- *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.

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 to eligible families.

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 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. 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>.

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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 [COVID-19 Home Visiting Screening Flowchart](#).

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.

Q10: 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.

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New: Q11. A foster or residential agency is working on completing all required employee background checks per FCASPL 347 but has an employee who is hospitalized. What should the agency do to complete the background check requirement of an alleged perpetrator search when they are not able to obtain a signed a consent form or the other required documentation?

A. When the employee is out of the hospital and has returned to work, the employee can complete/sign/submit the necessary documents to return to work.

New: Q12. Do PCSA staff qualify as essential service workers? If they do, are there funds available to help offset their unexpected child care expenses? Is it possible to get a list of the new temporary childcare providers in our area?

A. Yes, they do qualify as essential service workers. Currently, financial assistance is available only for families in the Publicly Funded Child Care program. For information about pandemic child care options, please visit <http://jfs.ohio.gov/CDC/> and click on the “Family Pandemic Child Care Information” button.

New: Q13. Does the ACF guidance saying teleconferencing is acceptable for monthly caseworker visits apply to phone calls to parents and other case plan participants? Will we be counted out on a review if we call or conference our parents during this unprecedented time?

A. No, counties will not be “counted out” for required in-person visits during the emergency declaration period. While it is imperative that caseworkers continue to ensure the safety and well-being of children, this must be balanced against the health and safety of caseworkers, the children they are serving, and all individuals they come into contact with. The monthly caseworker visit requirement remains in place, but the [Practice Considerations Memo](#) sent by Director Hall on March 16 was intended to provide PCSAs with the ability to determine alternative/creative methods of contact with children, adults, and/or foster care providers when the safety and well-being of children have been assessed and are not compromised.

Alternative forms of contact – including Skype, Facetime, and phone calls – are acceptable in circumstances in which face-to-face visits are not possible, despite the agency's best efforts, due to COVID-19. If an agency uses alternative methods of communication under these limited, specified circumstances, caseworkers must conduct communications in accordance with the timeframe established. They also must closely assess the child's safety at each conference. In addition, we encourage agencies to consider immediate plans of action if a caseworker is not be able to reach a child via videoconference, or if the videoconference raises a concern about the child's safety or well-being. The contact type and reason should be well-documented in the case record (SACWIS). Scheduling conflicts are insufficient grounds for modifying this in-person requirement.

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New: Q14. Due to foster parent training sessions being canceled, can agencies recertify foster homes that may not have required hours?

A. As you know, the certification and training requirements are in statute, so we are working to find emergency solutions to adjust training requirements as a result of the exigent circumstances. As a reminder, OAC 5101:2-5-13 (A) (9) states the following regarding good cause for a foster caregiver's failure to complete the continuing training:

Each recommending agency shall establish and implement a policy regarding good cause for a foster caregiver's failure to complete the continuing training in accordance with rule [5101:2-5-33](#) of the Administrative Code. If the foster caregiver complies with the policy, as determined by the agency, ODJFS may renew the foster caregiver's foster home certificate. The agency shall submit the policy to the department and provide a copy to each foster home the agency recommends for certification or renewal. The policy shall include all the following:

- (a) What constitutes good cause, including documented illness, critical emergencies, and lack of accessible training programs.*
- (b) Procedures for developing a scheduled corrective action plan that provides for prompt completion of the continuing training.*
- (c) Procedures for recommending revocation of the foster home certificate if the foster caregiver fails to comply with the corrective action plan.*

Reminder: A corrective action plan is required whenever an agency cites good cause. It is recommended that agencies establish flexible deadlines for when foster homes must complete required trainings. In addition, ongoing training methods can be flexible during this time. Trainings can be in-person, live synchronous, or through Foster Parent College.

New: Q15. Due to foster parent training sessions being canceled, how should agencies address pre-service training requirements?

A. Pre-service training hours cannot be waived. However, the training sessions can be flexible during this time. Trainings can be in-person, live synchronous, or through Foster Parent College. Regardless of which training method is used, agencies still are required to ensure that all training topics are met.

New: Q16. Will all methods of foster parent training be eligible for stipend reimbursement?

A. At this time, all instructor-led training sessions will be eligible for stipend reimbursement up to the required hours, per their certification. As you know, the certification and training requirements are in statute, so we are working to find emergency solutions to adjust training requirements as a result of the exigent circumstances.

New: Q17. Do regional training centers have discretion to close their doors?

A. Regional training centers (RTCs) are individually administered by each PCSA through subgrant agreements and will operate according to their PCSAs' emergency/disaster plans. However, ODJFS encourages RTCs to explore alternative training opportunities, such as live synchronous, online, or virtual training. Here are some RTC updates (predating [Ohio's Stay at Home Order](#)):

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- **SWORTC** (Clermont County) canceled all staff trainings in March.
- **NWORTC** (Lucas County) canceled all trainings through March 31.
- **WORTC** (Greene County) suspended face-to-face training through April 6.
- **NCORTC** (Cuyahoga County) suspended training through April 13, except for the current round of pre-service training; canceled caregiver and supervisor conferences and foster parent night out.
- **ECORTC** (Guernsey County) canceled all training through April 15; considering offering virtual training.
- **SEORTC** (Athens County) extended cancellations of workshops through April 15.
- **NEORTC** (Summit County) canceled all trainings through April 18; offers virtual coaching and is open to online training.
- **CORTC** (Franklin County) canceled all trainings through April 30.

New: Q18. Does ODJFS have resources to fund and/or ship safety supplies (such as screen masks, gloves, and cleaning supplies) to licensed residential facilities?

A. We are exploring all options related to safety supplies. We have provided guidance to county staff to help them prepare for and conduct home visits. In addition, we encourage county agencies 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>.

New: Q19. Can ODJFS provide children services staff with personal protective gear for home visits?

A. We are exploring all options related to safety supplies. We have provided guidance to county staff to help them prepare for and conduct home visits. In addition, we encourage county agencies 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>.

New: Q20. Can residential agencies refuse access to their facilities by PCSA staff, ODJFS staff, or a parent?

A. Residential agencies can dictate restrictions but cannot prohibit access to youth. However, both agency staff and visitors can compromise to adjust visits to meet requirements and ensure safety.

New: Q21. Should ODJFS and the custodial PCSA be notified if a youth, staff member, caregiver, or household member tests positive for COVID-19?

A. Yes. Contact the OFC Help Desk via email Help-Desk-OCF@jfs.ohio.gov or telephone 1-866-886-3537, option 4. They will then notify the appropriate ODJFS staff so we can provide technical support and guidance.

New: Q22. If parents are calling into meetings instead of coming to the agency, are we able to initial for them to indicate approval?

A. If possible, obtain a signature via electronic means. If not possible, another option is to email the parent/party, attaching the necessary correspondence, and asking them to respond that they agree.

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New: Q23. There are several foster care policy recommendations pending. Will announcements be made via Q&A?

A. We will get information out as quickly as we can. We also will include it in the Q&A.

New: Q24. As workers are now utilizing videoconferencing to visit children in custody, should these still be labeled as face-to-face visits in SACWIS?

A. County agencies should make the determination to utilize videoconferencing on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with the [Practice Consideration Memo](#) sent on March 16. Caseworkers should specify the type of contact that was made in the case narrative. Below is an example of how agencies could record these visits in SACWIS:

Contact Type	Category	Sub Category	Location
Face to Face	Parties to the Case	Caregiver, Mother, Father, Child	Neutral Offsite or Other

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. 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.

New: Q2. With the Governor's order, will there be guidance for parents who share custody or have court-ordered visitation? How should parents with these types of agreements go forward?

A. Unfortunately, Child Support has no jurisdiction in custody or visitation matters. Visitation is established by either by a juvenile or domestic court. If possible, parents in these situations should work together to establish visitation details that comply with health and safety guidelines. The Supreme Court of Ohio is advising parents to work with their former spouse, attorney, or Legal Aid Society and the court of jurisdiction to determine how to proceed in situations concerning shared custody arrangements. Southeastern Ohio Legal Services issued a [press release](#) on this topic.

New: Q3. What should CSEAs consider the essential child support functions to be?

A. Each county will have to make that determination on a case-by-case basis. For guidance, see the [Practice Considerations Memo](#) sent by Director Hall on March 16.

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. Yes, meetings may be conducted by electronic means, as long as the public is notified and can participate.

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. 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.

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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.

Q8. Has ODJFS considered temporarily suspending 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 but 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 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.

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.

New: Q10. We have heard that our allocations could be cut 20%. Is this true?

A. We are awaiting guidance and will communicate any impact as soon as we have more information.

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***New:* Q11. Can we still enter into contracts and make purchases?**

A. We are awaiting guidance and will communicate any impact as soon as we have more information.

***New:* Q12. Could someone get a big internet provider to agree to provide internet services for county JFS staff to advance the telework concept?**

A. The Office of Information Services has been advising staff members needing internet services during the teleworking period to leverage the major companies that are offering free and/or discounted solutions to the public at the present time. Several leaders in the technology field are offering high broadband home internet access and/or hotspot capabilities to anyone needing them. Employees can reach out to AT&T, Comcast, Spectrum, T-Mobile, and several other major companies for additional information.

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).