

March 27, 2020

Dear Caregiver,

All of us at DCFS would like to thank you for continuing to open your home to our youth in care in the face of the spread of COVID-19 and the unprecedented public health crisis we now face. Your commitment to helping others will make a difference to the children in your care through this chaotic time. You serve as an example of the spirit that we all need for our communities to overcome the COVID-19 crisis.

Because of the extreme circumstances related to COVID-19 and the need to ensure that you and your family's health, and the health of children and caseworkers is protected, DCFS has enacted the following measures regarding visitation between parents, youth in care and siblings; and visitation between caseworkers and youth in care. These procedures have been implemented while also recognizing the importance of continued contact between youth in care and their parents and siblings.

Parent-Child and Sibling Visitation

DCFS has suspended all supervised *in-person* visitation between parents and youth in care and all in-person sibling visitation until further notice.

DCFS and private agency field staff will work with you to identify alternative ways to allow parent-child and sibling contact. *Video chat and phone calls will allow the children in your care to continue to communicate and bond with their parents and siblings, which is especially important during times of uncertainty.*

Existing unsupervised visitation may continue if the parent and/or child are not reporting or exhibiting any symptoms that would indicate a heightened level of risk of infection, according to IDPH and CDC guidelines. If a parent or child is unable to participate in an in-person visitation because of sickness or health concerns, DCFS and private agency staff will work with you to identify alternative ways to provide parent-child and sibling contact.

Caseworker-Youth Visitation

Caseworkers will conduct visits with you and the children in your home weekly, via video-conference or phone. The caseworker will need to speak with each child placed in your home individually, just as they would do normally. In-person visits with the caseworker will only take place if there are safety concerns or the placement is at risk of disruption. In those instances, caseworkers will take extra precautions, such as social distancing, frequent handwashing, use of protective gear and compliance with other CDC recommendations. Caseworkers will also conduct a brief pre-screening prior to any visit to ensure that it is safe and appropriate to do so.

My staff and I are continuing to monitor any new developments about the spread of the disease. We are in contact daily with the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) and other state agencies experienced at responding to infectious disease outbreaks.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the DCFS Central Office of Licensing at 217-785-2688.

For additional information and resources regarding COVID-19, please visit the following websites:

Illinois coronavirus website: <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/coronavirus/Pages/default.aspx>

DCFS website: <https://www2.illinois.gov/dcfs>

IDPH website: <http://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/diseases-and-conditions/diseases-a-z-list/coronavirus>

CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Again, thank you for all that you do to nurture, support and care for children. Our work to keep them safe would not be possible without you.

Sincerely,



Marc D. Smith

Acting Director, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services