

## **IDEA Part C Early Intervention (EI) Services Still Available to Families during COVID-19**

This Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) document addresses common questions EI referral sources may have regarding how to connect families to EI during COVID-19, and the family's experience with live video visits (also known as teletherapy or telehealth). Through live video visits and/or phone consultation, families continue to have access to the EI services for their infants and toddlers who have or are at risk of developmental delays that are so critical to their development.

*"In just two meetings, I've already got two different strategies to use that I never would have thought of. You start small and it's not overwhelming or anything. He's already saying more, so it's helped a lot."* -family receiving occupational therapy supports through live video visits (source: Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, <https://ectacenter.org/topics/disaster/ti-service.asp#liam>)

Information covered in this FAQ is based on several guidance documents developed by the Bureau of Early Intervention, which can be found here:

[http://www.wiu.edu/coehs/provider\\_connections/bureau/COVID-19.php](http://www.wiu.edu/coehs/provider_connections/bureau/COVID-19.php)

**Children and families can still be referred for EI, including initial evaluations to determine eligibility, assessments, development of Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs), and receive all EI services.**

EI services are currently being offered through live video visits (also known as teletherapy or telehealth). Medical diagnostics, assistive technology, audiology, and optometry assessments can be accessed in person through clinical visits as needed. The Department of Human Services Bureau of Early Intervention, along with multiple EI stakeholders as well as the Governor's Office of Early Childhood is currently planning for a phased-in return of face-to-face EI services to align with the Governor's Restore Illinois phased plan.

**This FAQ includes the following subject areas for your reference.**

1. EI services during COVID-19
2. Referrals to EI
3. EI eligibility criteria
4. Intake, enrollment and obtaining family consent
5. Family rights and choices with live video visits
6. Technology access resources
7. Transitioning from EI

### **1. EI services during COVID-19**

#### **What can families expect during the live video visit?**

Just like in-person EI visits, the live video visits will be conducted at a date/time that is convenient for the family. During the visit, the EI provider will coach the family around strategies to use with their child. This may include: checking in on how things have been going, reviewing the family's outcomes and

discussing what has been working and what has been challenging, jointly planning the focus for the visit, observing the child at play or within routines or interactions with other family members, suggesting strategies or modifications to try, connecting the family with necessary resources, and planning strategies to try until the next visit. Live video visits do not require the child to be attentive to the provider for the entire visit and visits can be done in shorter sessions.

### **How will medical diagnostics, assistive technology, audiology and optometry assessments be provided?**

In-person visits for these services are allowed if live video visits can't support the service. At this time, these are the only services permitted for face-to-face interaction within EI. Service coordinators will help families to make informed decisions about how to proceed based on the individual needs of their child and family. Children close to transitioning out of EI will be prioritized to ensure access to these services to the maximum extent possible before their transition. More details can be found in guidance developed by the Bureau of Early Intervention:

[http://www.wiu.edu/coehs/provider\\_connections/pdf/MedicalClinicFaceToFace%20Guidance-060820%20Final.pdf](http://www.wiu.edu/coehs/provider_connections/pdf/MedicalClinicFaceToFace%20Guidance-060820%20Final.pdf).

## **2. Referrals to EI**

### **How can I make a referral to EI?**

The process for making referrals to EI has not changed, and there are multiple ways of making referrals:

- 1) Complete the standardized EI referral form and fax it to the family's local Child and Family Connections Office (CFC).

- Here is a link to the standardized referral form:

<https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/SiteCollectionDocuments/hfs650.pdf>

- Here is a link to a listing of CFC offices and contact information:  
<https://blogs.illinois.edu/files/6039/114619/161635.pdf>.

- 2) Call the local CFC office. Voice mail is checked regularly, and a service coordinator will respond to a referral within two business days.
- 3) Call the Bureau of Early Intervention: 217-782-1981.

### **What if I need help making referrals to EI?**

As a primary referral source, you are a critical connector for families to EI and it is more important than ever to help families access these services. If you need help making a referral to EI there are resources that can assist:

- 1) Your local Child and Family Connections Office (CFC). The listing of CFC offices and contact information can be found here: <https://blogs.illinois.edu/files/6039/114619/161635.pdf>
- 2) The Bureau of Early Intervention: 217-782-1981.

### 3. EI eligibility criteria

#### What children are eligible for EI during COVID-19?

The eligibility criteria for EI has not changed; children should continue to be referred as normal.

#### **There are three ways children can qualify for EI.**

- 1) If the child has a 30% developmental delay in one of the five developmental domains. Delay is determined through the use of IDHS-approved diagnostic evaluation and assessment instruments to be completed through live video visit; or
- 2) If the child has a physical or mental condition that typically results in a developmental delay. These children are automatically eligible. The approved list of conditions can be found here: <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=96962> ; beginning July 1st this list will include children with a confirmed elevated blood lead level of 5 mcg/dl or greater; or
- 3) If the child is considered “At risk of substantial developmental delay.” Children automatically qualify if they are experiencing either:
  - A parent who has been medically diagnosed as having a mental illness or serious emotional disorder defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 (DSM 5) that has resulted in a significant impairment in the client's level of functioning in at least one major life functional area or a developmental disability; or
  - Three or more of the following risk factors:
    - Current alcohol or substance abuse by the primary caregiver;
    - Primary caregiver who is currently less than 15 years of age;
    - Current homelessness of the child. Homelessness is defined as children who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, in conformity with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act;
    - Chronic illness of the primary caregiver;
    - Alcohol or substance abuse by the mother during pregnancy with the child;
    - Primary caregiver with a level of education equal to or less than the 10th grade, unless that level is appropriate to the primary caregiver's age; or
    - An indicated case of abuse or neglect regarding the child and the child has not been removed from the abuse or neglect circumstances.

### 4. Intake, enrollment and obtaining consent

#### What can families expect after the referral is made?

A service coordinator will reach out to the family by phone within two business days of receiving the referral. This is an introductory call where the service coordinator will explain the intake process and schedule a time for the intake appointment that is convenient for the family. **Families must provide written consent to complete the initial evaluation. A service coordinator will mail the consent form to the family for them to complete and return.**

### **What if the family's insurance does not cover EI services?**

Families have the right to receive EI services regardless of their insurance carrier's coverage. The service coordinator will serve as a resource in discussing insurance and family fees. The initial evaluations/assessments to determine eligibility and identify strengths and areas of concern and service coordination are free.

### **How will the service coordinator obtain the family's consent for live video visits?**

Families must provide consent to participate in live video visits. The service coordinator will contact the family to get their email address to email the consent form or they can provide consent over the phone. The service coordinator will read the consent form to the family over the phone and obtain their verbal consent or refusal. If the family chooses to sign the form themselves, the service coordinator will also need to mail the consent form to the family to sign to be returned to the local CFC office. **The family's services will not be delayed once verbal consent is received.**

## **5. Family rights and choices with live video visits**

### **What options do families have for receiving EI services during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

It is entirely up to the family whether they would like to receive live video visits at this time. Families can choose to receive some, or all, of their services on their IFSP through live video visits.

If the family chooses not to receive live video visits, there are other options. A family can choose to talk by phone (i.e., phone consultation) with their providers. A family can also choose to maintain contact only with the service coordinator, by phone.

### **What if the family declines or is not able to do live video visits?**

If the family does not participate in live video visits, they may have the right to make-up services (i.e., compensatory services for missed sessions) they would have received during this time. Once face-to-face resumes, the team (with the family) will meet to discuss if compensatory services are needed and how many services, which will be determined on an individual basis.

## **6. Technology access resources**

### **What if a family does not have the technology to do live video visits?**

Service coordinators can help families access technology and internet needs in order to access evaluations and receive services.

The Early Intervention Clearinghouse is loaning, for free, technology (i.e., iPads and WIFI hotspots) to families to conduct live video visits. To receive the technology, families can contact the Early Intervention Clearinghouse at: [illinois-eic@illinois.edu](mailto:illinois-eic@illinois.edu), or 877-275-3227 or 217-333-1386.

The following resources have also been developed to help ensure live video visits can be provided to families without access to technology and/or stable internet connection.

1. Comcast has a program that offers low-cost computers. For additional information, please visit <https://internetessentials.com/low-cost-computer>.

2. The Arc of Illinois-Technology Fund for families will pay for a \$500 device for a family. For additional information, please visit <https://www.thearcofil.org/assistive-technology-program-application-form/>.
3. Internet Essentials - Comcast has a program for low-cost, high-speed internet services for families with low income. They have recently increased internet speeds to 25/3 Mbps and new customers get two months of free service. For additional information, please visit <https://www.internetessentials.com/>.
4. Comcast is offering free Wi-Fi and pausing data plans amid the COVID-19 crisis.
5. AT&T also has a program for low cost, high-speed internet services. For additional information, please visit <https://www.att.com/support/article/u-verse-high-speed-internet/KM1094463>.
6. Lifeline Program: Mobile telephone and internet companies can provide free mobile service including both voice and data through this program. The customer accesses the Lifeline benefit by obtaining service from one of the participating companies and the companies verify eligibility. For additional information, please see the CUB brochure or visit the Illinois LinkUp/Lifeline website at <http://linkupillinois.org/> for qualifying assistance programs.
7. Safelink is a well-established lifeline mobile carrier. For additional information, please visit <https://www.safelinkwireless.com/Enrollment/Safelink/en/Web/www/default/index.html#!/newHome>

## **7. Transitioning from EI**

### **What happens if a child is turning three and needs to transition to PreK and/or Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)?**

Service coordinators and local school districts (LEAs) must support families transitioning out of EI so children can continue receiving necessary supports from their LEA as of their third birthday. LEAs have a number of options to help families transition to ECSE including 1) face-to-face evaluations if safe for the family and 2) telephone or video-conference evaluations that can be spaced out over multiple sessions. If the family provides written consent, families can also use their IFSP to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) with their local school district. ISBE has released two guidance documents on this topic: <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/SPED-FAQ-04-20-20.pdf> and <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/IDPH-ISBE-Summer-Programs-Guidance.pdf>.