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John Bel Edwards, Governor
Marketa Garner Walters,
Secretary

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Dear Foster Caregiver,

Thank you for your daily sacrifice, which allows for the safety and well-being of our children, today and into their futures. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is grateful for your dedication during times of challenge, like those we face currently with Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Within the most recent days, we have seen our state and federal government take record measures to mitigate the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The Department of Children and Family Services is committed to the safety of our children, families and our foster/kin caregivers. As a valued partner, we care about your family, health and well-being and would like to provide you with the most up-to-date information about our response to COVID-19 and how that impacts your role as a foster/kin caregiver.

The Department of Children and Family Services is working closely to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and to address the evolving public health concerns. We are also coordinating efforts with our sister agencies whose operations overlap with ours to ensure consistency of protocols. We are following all guidance provided by the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) relative to COVID-19.

The circumstances of COVID-19 are evolving and recommendations will change in the coming days and week. LDH has launched a website that includes extensive information that is updated daily ldh.gov/coronavirus.

What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and how does it spread?

- COVID-19 is a respiratory virus. Current symptoms have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.
- According to the Center for Disease Control, the virus is spreading mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with each other (within 6 feet).
- Spread is from respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

Who should be most cautious?

Those considered “high risk” include people who are older adults, and anyone with underlying health conditions or a weakened immune system. We are asking all foster/kin caregivers to use good judgement to prevent the spread of COVID-19. If you fall into a high risk category you should exercise additional caution to reduce exposure to others, including visitors in your home or regularly scheduled appointments for you and your foster child(ren). You can learn more about what precautionary steps you can take if you are in a high risk category on the CDC’s website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html> .

How does COVID-19 impact children?

Based on available evidence, children do not appear to be at higher risk for COVID-19 than adults. While some children and infants have been sick with COVID-19, adults make up most of the known cases to date. Additional information about COVID-19 and children can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>



What should I do if I think my foster child or someone in my household is sick and I am worried it may be COVID-19?

Immediately contact your healthcare provider to discuss signs and symptoms. The healthcare provider will provide you with further guidance on getting tested. If you do not have access to a health care provider contact, you can call 2-1-1, a 24-hour state-supported telephone hotline, text LACOVID to 898-211 or visit: <https://www.louisiana211.org/>. **Also, immediately notify your assigned foster care worker(s) and/or their supervisor. If you are unable to reach your assigned worker/supervisor, call (337) 936-2303 for further assistance (available 24 hours a day during this time).** The CDC developed the following guidance related to seeking medical assistance:

- Sick with fever (higher than 100.3° F) or newly developed respiratory illness such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat.
- Recent international travel (within the last 14 days) from [COVID-19-affected geographical areas](#)
- Close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days

As a general rule of thumb, when someone in your household is sick, you can take these precautionary measures in addition to talking with your healthcare provider:

- Keep the sick person in a separate, well-ventilated room and apart from other people and pets as much as possible.
- If a separate space is not available, keep a safe distance of at least 6-feet from other household members or those who are well.
- A sick person who is coughing or sneezing should wear a mask when around other people. If the sick person cannot wear a mask, the caregiver should wear a mask. The bathroom should be cleaned every day using a household disinfectant according to the directions on the label. Wear gloves while cleaning.
- Provide the sick person with a separate bathroom if available and a trash bag within reach.
- Limit activities outside the home until the sick person is feeling well for at least one day.
- Limit outside visitors.

What should I do if I have questions about my foster child, including questions about visitation or childcare?

Please reach out to your child's foster care worker and/or supervisor if you have any questions about visits and/or child care. If you are unable to reach your worker and/or supervisor and you need immediate assistance, call (337) 936-2303.

What should Foster/Kin caregivers be doing to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19?

Limit and screen visitors to your home and exercise extreme caution when taking children out of the home:

If possible, we recommend limiting the number of visitors to your home and use alternative communication methods for appointments, like FaceTime, Skype, Telemed, or Zoom Meetings whenever possible. We are encouraging our staff to utilize these communication methods as well in their work with children and families.

We have also directed staff to call in advance of any home visit to screen all household members for any of the conditions below and encourage you to do the same with visitors in your home, whether they are your family, friends, or a provider for your foster child(ren).

- Are you or anyone in your household sick with fever (higher than 100.3° F) or newly developed respiratory illness such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat?
- Have you traveled internationally (within the last 14 days) to a [COVID-19-affected geographical areas](#)?
- Have you had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days?



Practice universal precautions and good daily hygiene

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially:
 - After going to the bathroom;
 - Before eating;
 - After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing; and
 - Upon entering and exiting your home
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover a cough or sneeze with a tissue and dispose of the tissue.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth without carefully washing your hands.
- Properly clean all frequently touched surfaces on a regular basis using everyday cleaning products.
- Avoid sharing dishes, drinking glasses, eating utensils or towels.
- Wash dirty dishes in dishwasher or, if by hand, with warm water and soap.
- Laundry can be washed in standard washing machine with warm water.
- In order to avoid germs, do not shake dirty laundry or "hug" dirty laundry to your chest to carry it.

Develop an Emergency Preparedness Plan for your household:

- Keep adequate supply of water, food, and pet food in your home. If you are prescribed medications, contact your health care provider, pharmacist, or insurance provider about keeping an emergency supply at home. If you need assistance with obtaining medication for your foster child, contact your child's healthcare provider, worker, or supervisor, who should be able to assist.
- Have and practice a backup plan. In the event the primary caregiver becomes ill, determine who will provide support and care for the family. If assistance is needed with childcare, contact the child's case worker.
- Create an emergency contact list to include: family, neighbors, health care professionals, DCFS worker, teacher etc.
- Keep a working thermometer and medications on hand.
- Learn about the preparedness plans of your children's childcare facilities, school, and/or colleges.
- Plan for alternative care should schools be closed longer than anticipated.
- Ask about your employers' preparedness plans, including sick-leave policies and telework options.

What is the Department of Children and Family Services doing to mitigate the risk of spreading COVID-19?

DCFS is following all directives put in place by Governor John Bel Edwards and adopting the following precautionary measures into the foreseeable future:

- Temporarily closing all office buildings to the general public while having a small group of staff in the building while majority are working remotely
- Ensuring all offices, including visitation rooms are thoroughly cleaned
- To the extent possible, rescheduling or conducting the majority of face-to-face appointments with clients utilizing alternate methods for communication such as: FaceTime, Skype, or Zoom.
- Postponing statewide events and meetings when possible
- Encouraging all employees who are sick to stay home and not come into work.
- Implementing screening questions for employees to ask before making any home visit.

Are there resources to assist me in talking to my foster child(ren) about COVID-19?

As children and/or youth become more aware of COVID-19, they may begin to worry and even become scared. It is important for foster/kin caregivers to remain calm and help them understand ways they can avoid getting or spreading COVID-19. Below are some links that foster parents and/or caregivers can utilize when talking to children about COVID-19.



The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has provided general principles for talking with children regarding COVID-19. [Talking with Children about COVID-19](#).

Louisiana Department of Health COVID-19 updates: <http://www.ldh.la.gov/Coronavirus/>

Child Mind Institute can found at: [Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus](#)

National Public Radio: [Just for Kids, A Comic Exploring the new Coronavirus](#)

Zero to Three Early Connections that last a lifetime: [Answering Your Young Child's Questions about COVID-19](#)

National Association of School Psychologist: [Talking to Children about COVID-19: A Parent Resource](#)

Multilingual Coloring Book Explaining Coronavirus: <https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

Two additional sources of twenty-four hour support for you and your family include:

1. Call 1-866-310-7977 24/7. Trained counselors available 24/7. All calls are confidential. If you are feeling overwhelmed with stress, fear and anxiety about the uncertainty surrounding this public health emergency, there is a special Keeping Calm through COVID Hotline you can call. This connects you to trained, compassionate counselors who can offer support and who can direct you to mental health and substance abuse counseling services.
2. Call (337) 936-2303. This is an emergency contact for DCFS foster parents and caregivers in the event that you cannot reach your assigned foster care worker and/or supervisor. Someone will be available 24 hours a day during this time.

As always, thank you for your dedicated and tireless work in taking care of the children in our state.

Rhenda Hodnett, Assistant Secretary
Department of Children and Family Services – Child Welfare Division

