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| SEAL_Revised, Brighter Letters_crop_compressed | **Commonwealth of Massachusetts** |
| ***Executive Office of Health and Human Services*** |
| **Department of Youth Services** |
| ***Re-Opening Guidance for DYS Community Operations Staff*** |

This Guidance establishes the guidelines and procedures that all Department of Youth Services (DYS) state and contracted provider community staff must follow as DYS resumes increased in-person contacts, home visits and passes during COVID 19. DYS reserves the right to revoke or modify this protocol and these procedures at any time, if it determines that the public health and/or safety of youth and staff are at risk, or to comply with state and federal guidance.

Please note: DYS Caseworkers are the primary staff named in this document; however, all guidance is applicable to other community-based positions (e.g. District Managers, Apprehension Officers and Community Services Network provider staff) where appropriate in relation to associated job duties.

Please refer to these additional documents as supplements to this Guidance provided:

* ***Modifications to Visitation Guidance and Passes Protocols during COVID 19***
* ***EOHHS Residential Programs Off-Site Visit Attestation Form for DYS***
* ***DYS Safety Protocol for Home Passes***
* ***Cleaning and Disinfecting DYS District and Satellite Offices***
* ***DYS COVID-19 Screening Questions for Home Visits***

**Community Visits**

DYS Caseworkers will gradually resume face-to-face contacts with youth and families as described below and shall prioritize such contacts based on individual need and risk level of the youth as follows:

1. Youth in the community who transitioned home during the crisis period (beginning 3/10/20);
2. Youth who have scored high or very high on the validated risk assessment tool (Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory – YLS/CMI) and/or are placed on the Department’s highest levels of community supervision;
3. Youth in need of a Pre-Revocation Review;
4. Youth with expressed needs for in-person contact; and
5. Families of newly committed youth in order to conduct or complete the initial home study

The types of face-to-face contacts that have occurred during the crisis period (limited; observing social distance and use of PPE; held outside) such as dropping off/retrieving documentation to be signed, installing GPS and providing supplies as needed to youth and families shall continue. Caseworkers may opt to conduct community visits at alternate locations such as parks, restaurants, malls and additional spaces deemed safe to observe proper social distancing.

**Home Visits**

DYS Caseworkers will gradually reinstate in-home visits with youth and families as part of their case management strategy. The following precautions shall be taken:

1. The must be scheduled to best ensure that there is a limited number of people in the home during the visit.
2. Prior to the visit, Caseworkers will complete the *DYS COVID-19 Screening Questions for Home Visits* with those individuals who will be present for the visit and shall communicate to families that they too have answered the screening questions prior to the visit.
3. In advance of the visit, Caseworkers will communicate the guidelines for the visit so that there are clear expectations and an understanding of what will take place – including but not limited to duration, social distancing expectations, use of PPE, no physical contact (e.g. shaking hands), and areas of the home to be observed (namely for the initial home study).
4. Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will be provided for staff use.
5. *DYS COVID-19 Care Packages* will be distributed to families upon the first Caseworker visit (back) to the home. The *DYS COVID-19 Care Package* shall include facial coverings, hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes and educational materials (can be found on PULSE and shall be printed).
6. The DYS Caseworker shall inform the youth and family that the utilization of PPE is required during the home visit. Youth and families are encouraged to maintain and use their own PPE for future home visits; however, Caseworkers may supply PPE if needed.
7. If an individual present during the in-home visit refuses to utilize PPE and/or practice appropriate social distancing, the Caseworker may end the visit.

In addition to in-home visits, Caseworkers are encouraged to conduct home visits by meeting in front of youths’ homes, from their vehicle, in backyards or on porches as long as deemed safe to do so. Confidentiality of youth information and neighborhood safety shall be a consideration.

When conducting the initial home study for newly committed youth, Caseworkers shall enlist an approach that includes a combination of in-home observation and interview with the parent/legal guardian with a virtual meeting or telephone call to gather the necessary information for the Case History.

**Passes**

DYS Caseworkers are critical to the release planning process for youth and are integral to the successful execution of passes. Youth passes from residential programs may gradually resume beginning July 10, 2020.

1. An individualized pass plan shall be developed for each youth with a focus on gradually transitioning from grounds, individual and community partner passes as appropriate and in accordance with *DYS Passes Policy #: 03.02.25(b)*. Each pass plan shall be aimed at supporting the youth’s transition to the community with particular consideration of the purpose and intended outcomes of each pass given the limitations resulting from the current COVID-19 crisis. Each pass request shall be reviewed and approved by the regional Pass Review Team (PRT) in accordance with the *DYS Passes Policy #: 03.02.25(b)*.
2. Prior to an in-home pass, the parent/legal guardian will be required to sign an attestation that there is no one residing or will otherwise be in the home during the individual or community partner in-home pass who is known or suspected to have COVID-19. The Caseworker shall ensure the attestation is obtained – either in person with parent/legal guardian’s signature or verbally (see *EOHHS Residential Programs Off-Site Visit Attestation Form for DYS*).
3. During the in-home pass, the youth, the parent/guardian, other household members, and visitors present in the home should wear facial coverings, and practice social distancing and good hand washing hygiene. If an individual present during the in-home pass refuses to follow these expectations, the Caseworker may end the pass.
4. Caseworkers are encouraged to conduct individual home passes – either the entire visit or a portion of it – in locations other than the home such as parks, restaurants, malls and additional spaces that ensure proper social distancing and which encourage reunification with the family and the community.

Please refer to *Modifications to Visitation Guidance and Passes Protocols during COVID 19* for additional information.

In support of the gradual reintegration of youth to the community, youth in Track 2 programs may have access to the community for identified service needs and engagement such as employment, education, etc. on an individual basis. Please refer to the *Modifications to Visitation Guidance and Passes Protocols during COVID 19* for safety protocols regarding the youth’s return to the program.

**Program Visits / Contacts**

DYS Caseworkers shall begin to gradually visit with youth in residential program settings in accordance with the recently issued *Modifications to Visitation Guidance and Passes Protocols during COVID 19* and based on but not limited to the priority circumstances listed below:

1. Youth is newly committed to DYS within the crisis period
2. Youth is soon to be released from placement (in the 90-, 60-, 30-day transition phase)
3. Youth has expressed needs for in-person contact

**Transportation**

Transportation of youth by the DYS Caseworker allows for meaningful dialogue during the course of a critical transaction. The regular transportation of DYS youth is a function of a DYS Caseworker and has been reduced to largely one purpose during the COVID-19 pandemic – transporting youth home upon release from a residential setting. The need for this type of transportation will continue and it is anticipated that transportation needs will eventually increase as we expand community operations and increase in-person contact.

DYS Caseworkers will continue to use their personal vehicles for transportation of youth. State vehicles will also be an option when available. Access to the state vehicles will require proper planning and scheduling; availability may become an issue as transportation needs increase.

Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will be provided for transportation of youth.

Additional guidance regarding transportation forthcoming in *Guidance for Transportation during COVID-19*

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

DYS Caseworkers will be provided with the following PPE:

* Surgical masks
* Disposable gloves
* Surgical gowns
* Hand sanitizer
* Disinfecting wipes (or alternative - paper towels / disinfecting spray - if wipes unavailable)
* Lysol spray
* Face shield / goggles​
* Seat covers\* - staff will be reimbursed up to $100 for a reusable seat cover purchase of their own to best accommodate their specific needs (e.g. make of car). Staff shall include a receipt of purchase with their monthly reimbursement submission and indicate the expense in the OTHER column on the reimbursement form.

District Offices will receive batches of PPE based on anticipated utilization. All DYS purchased supplies – PPE for staff and contents for *DYS COVID-19 Care Packages* for youth and families - will be stored at an identified regional location and picked up by a District Office point person on a monthly basis. Ziploc bags will also be provided so that all supplies may be sorted into individual staff kits and care packages.

**Community District and Satellite Offices**

In-person gatherings at the District or Satellite Office (including activities, youth and/or family convenings and staff meetings) will not occur. District and Satellite Office staff shall maintain the in-office/telework schedules they developed during the initial COVID-19 pandemic, as many locations may not allow for proper social distancing of groups of people. Schedules are subject to change.

DYS Caseworkers shall conduct community-based, in-person visits on their telework days, beginning and ending their workday at home versus the District or Satellite Office. As of 7/12/20, coding in SSTA shall be as follows:

REG - for days staff report to the District Office or do any field-based work

TEL - for days staff work the full 7.5 hours from home (no field-based work)

Individual youth or family member visits to District or Satellite Offices during this time are not required; however, a youth or family member who shows up at the office should not be turned away (staff shall step outside or allow the individual in the office if it is safe to do so and observe social distancing and wear PPE).

District and Satellite Office staff will adhere to the *Cleaning and Disinfecting DYS District and Satellite Offices* guidelines in maintaining the cleanliness of the office locations and will be provided with the appropriate PPE to do so.

**Virtual Meetings**

Given the phased approach for increasing face-to-face, in-person contacts by and among DYS casework staff, the effective utilization of virtual meetings is critical. Staff are expected to utilize the video functionality when participating in virtual meetings – particularly when a youth and/or family member is also participating. DYS Caseworkers are all equipped with either an iPhone and/or iPad to accommodate video participation and should seek training to familiarize themselves with the functionality of WebEx as needed.

For the near future, the following meetings will continue to be held virtually:

1. Monthly Treatment Meetings
2. Casework Team / Client Review Meetings
3. Staff Meetings
4. 90-, 60-, 30-day transition meetings

A live, virtual tour of the District or Satellite Office is to be conducted by Caseworkers as part of the 30-day transition meeting to allow for a youth to be virtually introduced to the office space and to virtually “meet” other members of the team.