

To the DDS Community –

In March, DDS stopped all visitation to our group homes and facilities in response to the COVID -19 crisis. This very important measure was taken in order to keep our residents and staff safe and to do everything possible to stop the spread of the virus.

I know it has been very difficult for families not to be able to see their sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. Although our staff have tried creative ways to keep connections through phone calls, FaceTime, and Zoom, nothing replaces seeing your loved one face to face.

Attached is the revised Visitation Policy for DDS Residential Programs, which will go into effect on Wednesday, June 10, 2020.

Although this new guidance allows for in-person visits, it still includes restrictions – meeting outdoors only, screening visitors for symptoms of illness and fever, wearing face coverings, and no touching – that we must follow to keep our community safe. There is nothing that can replace the physical embrace of your loved one, however, it is a step in the right direction.

We will continue to enforce proper procedures in infection control, cleaning, good hygiene, and the wearing of PPE. And we will continue to track the virus by monitoring the health of our residents, tracking positive cases, and making testing available to individuals and staff. We hope to revise our visitation policy further, as soon as it is safe to do so.

Thank you for your ongoing patience and your willingness to work with us as we meet the challenge of this pandemic. I know your loved ones cannot wait to see you.

Jane F. Ryder
Commissioner
Department of Developmental Services



Visitation Policy for DDS Residential Programs

Issued June 6, 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines to allow residents the opportunity to restore visitation on a limited basis during the COVID-19 pandemic while adhering to recommended Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) guidelines. The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) recognizes how difficult it has been to stay connected during this time, while we all adhere to strict precautions to stop the spread of the virus. Public health experts have now determined that outside visitation is safe when certain precautions, such as social distancing and face coverings, are strictly followed.

DDS Residential Programs may begin to allow outside visitation, following the rules below, starting June 10, 2020. Each DDS Residential Program (hereafter "Program") must determine whether visitation can be safely permitted for residents, visitors, and staff.

Designated Outdoor Area

- Visitors will be permitted in a designated outdoor area, such as the yard, patio, open porches, parking lot, or driveway.
 - No enclosed outdoor spaces are permitted. For example, if a tent is used, it must have airflow and no sides.
 - If the facility erects a tent, you may need to ask your town or city if you require a temporary permit for the structure.
- Visitors will not be allowed entry into the home or facility for any reason.

Limitations on Visitors

- Visits will be limited to 2 visitors at a time.
- Children and at-risk people are strongly encouraged to remain home.
- Only one visit can occur at a group home at one time.
- Barbecues and parties are prohibited.
- Failure to adhere to these guidelines will result in the termination of the visit.

Visitor Screening

- All visitors must be screened prior to visiting with a resident.
 - Visitors are not permitted to visit if they have symptoms of COVID-19, including fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, muscle pain, chills, or new loss of taste or smell.
 - Anyone with a fever (100.0 F or higher) **will not be permitted to visit** the home.
 - Thermometers must be disinfected after each use, per the manufacturer instructions.
 - Visitors are not permitted to visit if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days or if they have been ordered by a health care professional or public health official to quarantine due to exposure.



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- Any individual who participates in a visitation and develops signs and symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, muscle pain, chills, or new onset loss of smell or taste within 2 days after the visitation must immediately notify the program of the date they were on site, the individuals they were in contact with, and the locations where the visit occurred.
 - Programs should immediately screen any resident and staff who had contact with the visitor for the level of exposure and follow up with the program's medical staff or the resident's care provider.

Face Masks

- All visitors are required to wear a face covering mask during the visit.
 - Visitors should bring their own face covering, in order to preserve the program's PPE supply. However, if a visitor does not have a face covering, one will be provided.
- Residents will also be encouraged to wear face coverings if they can tolerate it and do so safely.

Social Distancing and Supervision

- Visitors and residents must follow social distancing guidelines and remain 6 feet apart.
 - Please consider asking visitors if they and their loved one will be able to adhere to social distancing as this may be confusing for some individuals or counterintuitive for them emotionally. Visits are not recommended for all individuals.
- A program staff member trained in resident safety and infection control measures must remain with the resident at all times during the visit.

Scheduling Visits in Advance

- A program may limit the length of any visit, the days on which visits will be permitted, the hours during a day when visits will be permitted, and the number of times during a day or week a resident may be visited. Programs are encouraged to allow visiting hours throughout the day, and should stagger visits as necessary in order to accommodate social distancing.
- Visits must be scheduled with the program in advance to allow coordination with others that may also want to visit and to ensure appropriate staffing levels.
- It is preferential to have visits occur at the same time each week for planning purposes.
- Visits will be limited to no more than 30 minutes to limit exposure and to ensure that staff can assist with the visit as required. Visits will be limited to once per week or more at the discretion of the provider.
- Advance notification will ensure that the home is not under quarantine and that the individual served can be emotionally prepared for the visit.
- Programs must keep a log of all visitors, including name, date of visit, and staff on shift.
- Programs will continue to support alternative electronic methods for communication between residents and visitors, such as Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp or Google Duo.



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Quarantined Homes and Isolated Residents

- Visitations will not be permitted with anyone who is currently under isolation because they are presumed or confirmed COVID-19 positive or quarantined because of close or household contact.

Disinfecting the Visitation Area

- If the designated outdoor area includes chairs, tables, or a picnic bench, all surfaces should be disinfected using an [EPA-approved disinfectant for use against SARS-CoV-2](#) after each visit.

Visitation Policies Subject to Change

- Failure to adhere to these guidelines may require the termination of the visit and may result in a temporary ban on visitation.
- DDS, a residential program, or provider may have to change this policy with little notice as required by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health or local boards of health.
- Providers, facilities, or group homes may continue to prohibit visitation on a case-by-case basis, if a resident or staff tests positive or shows symptoms of illness, or it is determined visitation cannot safely be accommodated for residents, visitors, or staff.