

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Preparedness for Staff Doing Home Visits

Montgomery County (MD) | Updated: March 19, 2020

The following guidance is in effect until further notice and is based on the most current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for the prevention of the spread of the novel coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) and the management of persons suspected of having COVID-19. Specific additional guidance for Adult Services and Child Welfare programs, as well as Homeless Services is documented below. Please review this information with your program's leadership and staff and make any necessary adjustments to your program practice and protocols. This guidance is not intended to address every potential scenario that may arise as this event evolves.

Visitation Guidance for Adult and Child Protective Services

Adult and Child Welfare services are often the sole safety net for vulnerable children, adults and families coming to the attention of the Department. It is critical for DHHS casework staff to continue to follow statute and regulation guidance and respond to allegations of abuse and neglect and determine the safety of children and vulnerable adults in their current home/situation, provide in-home and family preservation services, and out-of-home services.

A. Guidance for making an APS/CPS visit:

Staff must respond to APS/CPS referrals as required and utilize law enforcement as appropriate. Staff should practice situational awareness, social distancing and appropriate hygiene as they visit a home. In-person visits should be made as brief as possible.

If in any interaction you suspect that the person you are working with appears to be ill or reveals that they are not feeling well, please follow this simple process.

1. **Ask how the potentially ill person is feeling.** COVID-19 is characterized by symptoms including fever of greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (99.6 degrees Fahrenheit in individuals over the age of 60), coughing, shortness of breath or trouble breathing.
2. **If the individual confirms they have one or more of the above symptoms:**
 - a. **Non-Essential Service:** If available, provide the individual with a surgical mask and ask them to reschedule the visit. Instruct the individual to return home (avoid public transportation) and begin self-isolation immediately. If they have any questions or concerns, instruct them to contact their healthcare provider by phone. If they do not have a healthcare provider, get their contact information and let them know someone will follow up by phone to assist them with this need.
 - b. **Essential Service:** If you must meet with a sick individual, provide the individual with a mask, ask them to put it on and move to a place where you can maintain a distance of 6 feet. When closer proximity to the individual is required, ask the client to turn their head away from you and place a mask on yourself as well. All attempts must be made to not meet directly with sick individuals.

B. Guidance for making a scheduled visit in relation to adult services, family preservation, or foster care services:

Face-to-face contact with a child(ren), family and vulnerable adult is dependent on the safety, risk, and needs of the child, family, and adult. Ensuring a child or vulnerable adult's safety is paramount to our work. If possible, attempt to meet with the individual or family via Skype, Facetime or another online video chat format. In-person visits should be made as brief as possible. When preparing or scheduling appointments for home- or placement-based visits, please follow this simple process.

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Note: The CDC does not recommend healthy people to wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses including COVID-19. One should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it and/or one is showing symptoms or who have COVID-19 infection; this is to protect others from the risk of infection.

Visitation Guidance for Homeless Services

Montgomery County Homeless Continuum of Care is committed to keeping staff safe and ensuring the health and safety of all people experiencing homelessness and in permanent housing programs. Many of these individuals and families in the community are vulnerable and may be at a higher risk of experiencing complications due to COVID-19. This does not mean that they are more likely to have or spread the virus. Staff should practice situational awareness, social distancing and appropriate hygiene as they visit a home.

C. Guidance for making a scheduled visit with a homeless individual or family:

All programs must triage the needs of the people being served on a regular basis. We understand that due to staff shortage and other limitations, most programs will not be able to continue at the same level of support. If this is the case, prioritize face to face visits with those households with the highest acuity of needs and most vulnerability. Visits should be brief and focused on an assessment of their wellbeing and living conditions. Other services like goal planning, budgeting, and other case management then be completed over the telephone. If face to face visits are not possible, attempt to meet with the individual or family via Skype, Facetime or another online video chat format. Telephonic communication is acceptable for households with lower acuity and an ability to address their basic needs independently. If the individual or family does not have a phone, you should get one for them.

If programs are unable to reach participants by phone or video chat, other efforts must be made to ensure the safety of well-being of the household. This could include contacting the property manager, neighbor, other service provider or family member to confirm that someone has spoken to or seen the program participant. If no one has seen the person, a home visit should be made.

When preparing or scheduling appointments for home visits, please follow this simple process.

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SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR WORKING WITH HOMELESS CLIENTS

Transporting program participants

Try to minimize transporting clients in cars. Staff should not transport anyone exhibiting signs of illness including but not limited to cough, runny nose, sore throat, or fever. If the person needs transportation to a medical facility call Metro Access or call for an ambulance if the symptoms are severe.

Keeping people informed

Make sure people have accurate information about the virus. For some, this could cause additional fear and anxiety, so our goal is to minimize the impact. Share information about everyday disease prevention and the impact of COVID-19 on us locally. Click [here](#) for the latest information and videos from Montgomery County Health and Human Services. For some, videos may be more helpful than written documents.

Verifying basic needs are met

Check to see if participants have an adequate supply of food, medication, and hand soap. Soap may not be a top priority for some, so we encourage providers to supply this to participants. Many of the stores are struggling to keep the shelves stocked, so people on a fixed income and limited access to transportation may have a hard time finding basic necessities. Reach out to food pantries and other charitable organizations for assistance.

Staying connected

Make sure every household has a cell phone or landline. If we are unable to conduct home visits, we need a way to connect with people. Ask if there is a neighbor or family member that cares about them and can check on them. Many of the folks we serve struggle with social isolation and loneliness, so we need to be mindful of how we can stay in touch. Do they have things in the home to keep them entertained like a radio, tv, books, etc?

Montgomery County Hotline: 301-738-2255 Phone/text/chat

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 (EveryMind answers this line locally as well)

Homeless Information Line: 240-907-2688

Paying the rent

Households with income from employment may be experiencing a loss of income due to hours being cut, illness, school closures and other economic impacts. Consider reaching out to landlords if a delay in rent payment is anticipated. Let your contract monitor know if you expect the rent shortage to be significant. Montgomery County has issued a stay on any evictions for the next two weeks and utility companies have a moratorium on shutoffs and late fees. Share this information with households and help them plan. Permanent housing programs must work with households and landlords to maintain lease compliance and no program termination will be approved without contract monitor collaboration.