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# COVID-19 casework considerations

19 March 2020

## COVID-19 pandemic

The World Health Organisation has declared COVID-19 (often referred to as the “novel coronavirus”) a global pandemic.

The challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic are unprecedented and Office of the Children's Guardian is committed to supporting statutory out-of-home care and adoption service providers respond to this health crisis and ensure the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people, their carers and staff.

## Current health advice

In the first instance, all agencies should always confirm current health advice regarding COVID-19, with the Australian Government

Department of Health or NSW Health. The following sites hold a range of relevant advice and resources:

- <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-resources>
- <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>

Advice on managing COVID-19 is changing rapidly, often daily. It is essential that for the duration of this pandemic, agencies keep informed of these changes and incorporate current health advice into casework practice.<sup>[i]</sup>

## Casework and monitoring placements

Health advice regarding COVID-19 will inevitably and directly impact service delivery and casework, including placement monitoring and support. In accordance with *Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care* Standard 15, designated agencies are required to ensure that all placements of children and young people in statutory out-of-home care are monitored and supported according to individual circumstances. This includes regular contact with children and young people and the adults caring for them.

Each agency is responsible for determining its own policy and procedures, aligned with current health advice and in the best interests of the health and welfare of children, young people, carers, volunteers and staff. It is also responsible for effectively communicating these with all those affected in a timely manner, including when these evolve as

advice from health authorities changes.

For the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, general casework, monitoring placements and work health and safety requirements should incorporate the following:

## Apply current health advice

- keep informed of changes to advice/guidelines provided by the Australian Government Department of Health and NSW Health in relation to hygiene procedures, social distancing, quarantining and home isolation: what are these and when do they apply? how will these now apply in the agency's casework and workplace practice? how will the agency communicate these to children and young people, carers, birth families and staff?

## Identify vulnerability

- individual circumstances and monitoring and support of the placement: which placements are currently vulnerable or have additional support needs? On a case by case basis, how will these be monitored and supported during the pandemic, especially where there are school closures and carers may require additional supports?

## Develop, communicate and implement strategies

- how home visits can occur while maintaining hygiene procedures and social distancing, for example, visiting placements, but

remaining outside the home, or having visits outdoors at parks. Carers may be fearful that home visits present a health risk during the pandemic, so it is important that agencies provide clear assurances for home visit procedures based on current health advice from a recognised authority such as the Australian Government Department of Health or NSW Health.

- how home visit monitoring and support can be managed with increased telephone contacts and technology such as video conferencing to sight and converse with the child or young person and their carers. Agencies will need to consider how additional monitoring methods such as these, will be captured as a record of placement monitoring and support over time.
- how family time can occur while maintaining hygiene procedures and social distancing, for example, having visits in outdoor areas and where appropriate, using supervised telephone and video conferencing.
- how the agency will manage placements in the case that a child, young person, carer or household member is infected. Agencies should refer to the fact sheet issued by the Office of the Children's Guardian to all Principal Officers on 16 March 2020, COVID-19 Response - Authorisation of staff to provide foster care during the COVID-19 pandemic. ( 314.8KB)

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[i] Note: This advice is current at 19 March 2020 and will be updated over time.