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COVID-19 home visits, carer assessment and authorisations, carer reviews, home safety inspections and face-to-face family time

26 July 2021

This is an update to information previously issued by the Office of the Children's Guardian regarding home visits, carer assessment and authorisations, carer reviews, home safety inspections and face-to-face family time during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Current education advice

Keep up to date with current advice from NSW Education here:

- [Information about school attendance for students in NSW](#)

Current health advice

As restrictions and requirements can change rapidly, in the first instance, agencies should always confirm current health advice regarding COVID-19 with the Australian Government Department of Health and NSW Health. The following sites hold relevant advice and resources:

- Australian Government Department of Health: COVID-19 (Coronavirus) resources
- NSW Health: COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Visit [what you can and can't do under the rules](#) to keep up to date with changes to public health rules in NSW.

Agency policy and procedure

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.

Each agency is responsible for seeking its own legal advice and determining its own policy and procedures in the best interests of the health and welfare of children, young people, carers, volunteers and staff. Agencies should review policies and procedures and align these with the current advice available from websites listed above for:

- NSW Health, including changes to any public health orders
- NSW Education, including changes to school operations and student attendance

Agencies are also responsible for effectively communicating changes to policies and procedures with all those affected in a timely manner, including when advice from health and education authorities changes, restrictions increase or lift and school attendance requirements change.

Home visits, carer assessment and authorisations, carer reviews and home safety inspections

In accordance with Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care Standard 15, designated agencies must 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.

During periods when visits to carers' homes is permitted by health authorities, it is important that agencies provide clear assurances to carers, children and young people and casework staff regarding home visit procedures based on current health advice from the Australian Government Department of Health and NSW Health, taking extra care while visiting vulnerable people.

Individual circumstances will vary. If there are circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic in which agency staff are unable to enter a placement where a child or young person in statutory out-of-home care

is living, to complete home visits, carer assessment and authorisations, carer reviews or home safety inspections, please contact the Accreditation and Monitoring Team on 02 8219 3796 to consult on a case-by-case basis.

Face-to-face family time

Cancelling face-to-face family time due to the COVID-19 pandemic may contribute to children and young people in statutory out-of-home care becoming socially isolated and may cause psychological distress for children, young people and their birth families during these unprecedented times. In response to changing health restrictions many agencies have developed agile and innovative practice to support and monitor placements.

Family time and changes to restrictions on gathering and movement

According to Public Health (COVID-19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement) Order 2020 effective 31 March 2020:

Leaving a place of residence “for children who do not live in the same household as their parents or siblings or one or more of their parents or siblings – continuing existing arrangements for access to, and contact between, parents and children or siblings” is a reasonable excuse.

Other reasonable excuses to leave the person’s place of residence

include, but are not limited to:

- travel for the purposes of work or education if not possible at home
- travelling for the purposes of attending childcare
- accessing public services (whether provided by Government, a private provider or a non-government organisation, including social services)
- for emergencies and compassionate reasons
- undertaking any legal obligations.

A person must not participate in a gathering in a public place or more than two persons, however, this does not apply to:

- a gathering for work
- a gathering of members of the same household
- a gathering to provide care or assistance to a vulnerable person
- a gathering necessary for the person to fulfil a legal obligation.

Please refer to the Public Health (COVID-19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement) Order 2020 (effective 31 March 2020) and any subsequent Public Health Orders for full information. Agencies should also contact NSW local governments regarding any closures of specific public places in the local area (for example, when beaches are closed).

Agencies should consider how they can arrange and facilitate face-to-face family time taking into consideration what is legal and safe. This is particularly crucial for children and young people with a case plan goal of restoration, with increasing frequency and duration of

face-to-face family time being critical to the restoration process.

If an agency decides to suspend or cancel face-to-face family time for reasons due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the rationale for this decision should be clearly documented by the agency and will be subject to review by the Office of the Children's Guardian.

If you have questions about face-to-face family time during the COVID-19 pandemic, please contact the Accreditation and Monitoring Team on 02 8219 3796.

Previous point-in-time advice regarding arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic is available on our [fact sheet page](#). Please note that these resources reflect restrictions imposed at the time of publication:

- COVID-19 Home safety checklist for the provisional authorisation of carers (129KB)
- COVID-19 Changes to WWCC proof of identity requirements for authorised carers and adult household members
- COVID-19 response update
- COVID-19 casework considerations
- COVID-19 Authorisation of staff to provide foster care during the pandemic (314.8KB)

Note: This advice is current on 26 July 2021 and may be updated over time.

