

MEMORANDUM

TO: Foster Parents of Nova Scotia,
Executive Director, Federation of Foster Families

CC: Regional Service Delivery Managers
Mi'kmaw Family & Children Services
Service Delivery Directors
Child Welfare Specialists
CYFS Coordinators

FROM: Leonard Doiron, Executive Director, CYFS

RE: COVID-19

DATE: March 24, 2020

Hello everyone:

In response to the rapidly evolving situation to COVID-19, we would like to provide an update on child welfare services in relation to foster parents.

We are in unprecedented times and will continue to provide an essential service to Nova Scotian children and families. As a result, Department of Community Services and Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services Offices will remain open; however, in-person contact and access to child welfare staff will be limited. In keeping with medical advice and legal requirements regarding social distancing and in consideration of the health of our children and youth, your families and our staff, we have made changes to our program expectations. While social workers will continue to be available to provide support, it is likely that you will notice changes in how that occurs. There will be more phone contact rather than home visits at this time.

We recognize that regular contact with your social worker will be impacted and want to assure you that staff will continue to be available to respond to your needs. For urgent assistance, you are encouraged to reach out to your After Hours Response Team; 1-866-922-2434 for DCS, and for MFCS: 1-800-263-8300 (Eskasoni) and 1-800-263-8686 (Indian Brook). In addition, your PEER support program continues to be available.

We recognize that the recent decision by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to suspend in-school instruction for students and close licensed child care facilities may be presenting challenges for you and your family. We realize you may need to make alternate child care arrangements and where this has occurred, please discuss this with your social worker to make arrangements for approval and reimbursement.

In accordance with the need for social distancing, and in keeping with direction from the province's Chief Medical Officer under the Public Health Act, the decision has been made that all in person access and family visitation visits, whether specified by the Court, or arranged by the Agency, will be suspended and plans to transition access to virtual visits using technology will be put in place. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this decision is being made in an effort to protect children in care, parents and guardians, foster families, case aides and other DCS staff. As of March 18, 2020, virtual access has been implemented and will be reviewed the week of April 6, 2020. For a child in care who is exercising access or family visitation, a social worker will consult with you as the child's caregiver to determine what virtual access can be facilitated and considerations for scheduling this contact. Alternate forms of access could include the use of Facetime, Skype, Zoom, telephone calls or other means of contact. If you require assistance to be able to facilitate virtual access, this assistance might include the payment of any charge to block your telephone number from being displayed, payment of the costs of upgrading an internet plan, or the like. Your teamwork, flexibility and support in maintaining meaningful connections for children is very much appreciated.

At this time, we ask that you develop a plan with your network of family and friends in case you are required to self-isolate. If you are caring for a child who is considered medically fragile or has complex care needs, please discuss any specific concerns you have directly with your social worker and/or the child's social worker.

In addition, keeping with the direction we have been given by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, if you recently returned from travel outside Nova Scotia, or have symptoms - cough, fever or difficulty breathing:

- stay at home - do not go to an ER (unless a medical emergency) or your doctor's office;
- take the COVID-19 self assessment on the Nova Scotia Health Authority Department of Health and Wellness website at <https://when-to-call-about-covid19.novascotia.ca/en> and call the Health Line at 811 to speak with a registered nurse about the particulars of your situation.
- If you are required to self-isolate or have been given a COVID-19 test, immediately notify your social worker and let them know of any instructions provided to you by public health. Your social worker will assist you with any plans and actions that need to be taken.
- If you are choosing to self-isolate (i.e. due to risk issues, part of a higher risk population, etc.) please advise your social worker.

As well, please continue to practice the common preventative measures recommended by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and continue to teach the children and youth in your care to use them as well. These include:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. You can also use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer in the absence of soap and water.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Practice proper cough and sneeze etiquette. Cover your mouth and nose with your arm when coughing and sneezing and immediately dispose of used tissues in the trash.
- Stay at home if you are sick.
- Frequently clean and disinfect high-touch areas, such as toilets, bedside tables and door handles with diluted bleach or a regular household cleaner.

The Provincial Government will continue to monitor and where necessary implement protocols required to contain the virus. For the most up-to-date information related to COVID-19, please visit <http://www.novascotia.ca/CoronaVirus>

This is a quickly evolving situation with changes happening almost daily. We will do our very best to keep you informed. I want to express my sincere thanks for all you do, every day, to provide safe homes for children and youth. We are especially thankful, at times like these, for your care and commitment.

Take care and stay safe!