

Pennsylvania Family Support Programs
Planning Considerations
Aligned to Governor Wolf's [Process to Reopen Pennsylvania](#)
Revised July 30th, 2020

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) recognizes that maintaining the safety of the Family Support workforce and families is essential during the COVID-19 pandemic. OCDEL is utilizing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, as well as guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), to help Family Support programs begin planning to safely re-establishing face-to-face Family Support Services in their communities.

OCDEL is providing this planning guidance to help individuals who provide Family Support services and the families that receive services to be safe during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The use of virtual home visiting/tele-intervention is permitted in all phases of the reopening of Pennsylvania and should be considered an effective strategy for the delivery of Family Support services. In addition to the guidance within this document all Family Support Programs should follow all guidance from their Model Developers as related to delivering services with fidelity.

Above all other guidance and planning, Family Support programs must follow the guidelines offered by the [CDC](#), [DOH](#) and local jurisdictions. Pennsylvania's [business guidance](#) outlines mask-wearing requirements and additional safety parameters for both employees and customers including employee [health screening requirements](#). Family Support providers must always wear a mask when working in-person with a family regardless of the ability to practice social distancing. Family Support Programs shall be prepared to communicate their agency health and safety practices regarding their employees if requested by the family.

How to Plan:

As part of your planning process the Bureau encourages Family Support Program Staff to collaborate with Family Support programs within your service area as well as neighboring Family Support programs to assure expectations for services are being provided consistently. Once your organization has completed your planning process it is critical that all staff understand the plan so that it can be consistently communicated with families.

Planning Considerations for the Family Support Programs:

- Communicate the requirement that all providers delivering in-person services must wear a [mask](#) during the delivery of Family Supports services as stated in CDC guidance on masks and DOH Universal Face Covering order.
- Communicate the requirement to screen any family requesting in-person Family Support Services. A screening template is available, however locally developed forms are also permitted when they include the questions from the state issued template.
- Be familiar with policies developed by providers regarding screening, liability waivers and use of masks.
- Be familiar with the program's communication plan for families regarding the use of in-person Family Support Services.

- Coordinate the access to PPE & disinfecting products for your staff and families if applicable.
- Consider outdoor visits when possible.

Health & Safety Procedures - Personal Protective Equipment

Family Support professionals must turn to their employing agency for access to personal protective equipment (PPE) to include but not limited to; face masks and disinfecting products. There are many companies featured in [the Pennsylvania COVID-19 PPE & Supplies Business-2-Business \(B2B\) interchange directory](#) who are able to supply PPE. Grant funding may be used to support the purchase of PPE for use by Family Support providers. If families request the use of PPE (gowns/face shields) beyond what is established in provider health and safety practices, the provider agency may offer virtual home visits as an alternative to in-person services.

Health & Safety Procedures – Masks for Providers:

Family Support program providers must always wear masks when working in-person with a family, regardless of the ability to practice social distancing. A mask is defined as a face covering that covers the nose and mouth that is secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears or is wrapped around the lower face. All Family Support providers must wear a face covering that covers the nose and mouth during the entirety of service. The face covering must be a cloth covering or other mask that offers a higher degree of protection. For Family Support providers, plastic face shields are not acceptable alternatives to a face covering.

Masks can be challenging to incorporate into the relationship with a young child, so careful planning and preparation with the family supporting the child may be needed in advance of delivering the first in-person session. Many mask designs are available that allow the child and family to see the mouth of the service provider. The Office of Developmental Programs has guidance available in the [use of clear face masks to facilitate communication](#).

Face coverings can be a barrier when Family Support providers are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone with hearing loss or has another disability where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication. Alternate strategies to implement Family Support services, such as virtual home visiting/tele-intervention or demonstrating a strategy using a recording during an in-person session should be prioritized. When an in-person service is still identified, Family Support professionals should use another type of face covering such as a plastic face shield. It should be noted that the use of a full-face shield as an alternative to a mask may only provide some benefit.

If a mask becomes soiled, a new or laundered mask should be used when visiting another family in the same day. Cloth masks should be laundered each day as per CDC guidance.

As a reminder, follow the CDC and DOH guidelines regarding the use, type and style of face mask for a non-healthcare provider. A face covering can be made of a variety of synthetic or natural fabrics, including cotton, silk or linen. Face coverings can be factory-made, sewn by hand or be improvised from household items.

Health & Safety Procedures – Mask for Children & Families:

On July 1, 2020, the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health announced an [Order Requiring Universal Face Coverings](#). The order, signed under Secretary Levine's authority under the Disease Prevention and Control Act, outlines the situations when a mask must be worn and includes limited exceptions to the face-covering requirement.

Based upon Pennsylvania guidance regarding universal face coverings; it is required that adults and children over 2 who are present during an in-person service wear masks in their home or other setting where the family is receiving Family Support Services. Children under the age of 2 should not wear a mask at any time. Families should be prepared to supply their own mask(s) during the in-person Family Support program or should be provided with a mask if requested and available for all families. All participants in a group session should wear masks or be provided with masks if available for all participants. If a family indicates the adults will not to wear any face covering, the Family Support agency will offer virtual home visiting/tele-intervention strategies to implement model as an alternative to the in-person service.

Exceptions to mask wearing:

Any child over the age of 2 or adult, not including Family Support personnel, who cannot wear a mask due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition, or disability is encouraged to wear a full-face shield. Additionally, social distancing between non-household members must be in place for the duration of the in-person Family Support/Home Visiting service.

Health & Safety Procedures – Screening:

When there is an identified need for an in-person visit or group session, the provider of the Family Support program should contact the family or families prior to every in-person service delivery session to ask them the health screening questions found on the COVID Screener for in-person Family Support Services. Screenings must occur prior to any in-person service. The provider should document the responses to the screening on a form or within the visit note. A family is not required to respond to health screening questions to receive Family Support services. Families who choose to not be screened will be offered virtual home visiting/tele-intervention. A health screening template is being provided to include 3 screening questions and 2 additional considerations that must be used. If additional questions are desired, the questions will need to be approved by the Family Support Consultants with collaboration of the Evidence-Based Home Visiting or Family Support program model developers and with the Bureau of Early Intervention Services & Family Supports approval.

Health & Safety Procedures – Waivers:

Providers of Family Support services may develop waivers of liability to be signed by the Family participating in in-person Family Support services. Waivers developed by a Family Support agency should be done in conjunction with their legal counsel. A family is not required to sign a waiver of liability to receive Family Support services. Virtual Home Visiting/Tele-Intervention services should be offered if the family chooses to not sign a waiver of liability.

Health & Safety Procedures – During the In-Person Session:

Family Support providers should refrain from bringing outside items into the home or community setting. During a group activity each individual participating should have their own materials, materials should not be shared. If outside items are needed for an activity, they must be disinfected prior to and after use. Providers shall have protocols in place to disinfect any personal items used in the home or community setting and used by the provider and/or family. Providers should wash or disinfect their hands before entering and after leaving each home and in addition to wearing a mask, make every effort to maintain a six-foot social distance from the family when direct contact is not needed for the intervention. When facilitating group sessions all participants should maintain a six-foot social distance. When possible, providers and families should take advantage of outdoor spaces that support the family's routines for the delivery of in-person services.