

State of New Mexico

CHILDREN, YOUTH and FAMILIES DEPARTMENT

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March 13, 2020

Dear Caregiver,

We wanted to provide you with an update directly from Department leadership as you and your families navigate the news that novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, has been confirmed in New Mexico and the Governor and members of the cabinet are taking the safety and well-being of New Mexican very seriously and have therefore taken steps to close schools and cancel events over 100 people. This type of aggressive action has saved countless lives in other countries.

Since late January, CYFD has been working to update emergency and continuity of operations plans. We have been working closely with the New Mexico Department of Health to prepare for the eventuality that COVID-19 would make its way inside the state's borders.

The good news is that the six cases found in the state as of this writing have all been infections that occurred in other states and countries. This means that community spread-- the passing of COVID-19 from person-to-person -- has still not happened in New Mexico as it has in some other states.

Wednesday, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham took extraordinary measures to declare a Public Health Emergency now that infections from returning travelers are starting to be identified. CYFD will continue providing services to the children and youth in your care and to you during this time.

You may have heard that "nonessential" state personnel are to begin teleworking immediately. The department has determined that only employees whose complete job functions can be completed from a desk and computer will begin teleworking as of now.

Though the situation is rapidly evolving, critical direct services are continuing. As time goes on, we will ensure we continue that level of service and will update you urgently if any shifts occur. We are also taking extraordinary measures to disinfect visitation and waiting rooms between visits. In short, CYFD will continue providing the services and supports that we normally do to protect and provide services to children and youth at risk of or who have experienced abuse or neglect.

Public schools have taken the preventative measure of closing for the next three weeks beginning this coming Monday, March 16. Schools in states that have experienced community spread have taken this step, and New Mexico is committed to remaining proactive when it comes to best practices. We urge you and your children to use common sense measures such

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as frequent, thorough hand washing and daily disinfection of common surfaces (door handles, desks, chairs, etc.). The Early Childhood Division (the burgeoning Early Childhood Education and Care Department) remains in communication with child care centers as to which protocols to follow to keep children safe and healthy. At this time, there are no plans to mass-close child care facilities. We will update you if and when information changes.

We know that countless low-income and working families depend on children being in school and childcare centers. We are working urgently with the Governor and several other departments to see what supports we can establish quickly to meet the needs of impacted families. All official out-of-state travel for employees has been canceled, and employees returning from out-of-state will be asked to self-quarantine in direct consultation with the Department of Health.

Out-of-state travel for anyone in New Mexico is highly discouraged in the coming days and weeks. With public schools closed, the Department is encouraging families to remain in-state as the pandemic is expected to continue to grow. We are working on compiling a comprehensive list of in-state activities that children and families can still access. You should expect that to be distributed in the coming days. If you have visitors coming for non-essential travel, they are highly encouraged to postpone their visits.

We realize many families have involvement with the Courts. As of 3/12/2020 Presiding Judge Marie Ward at the Children's Court Division of at 2nd Judicial District in Albuquerque, New Mexico has implemented temporary practices in order to meet the Constitutionally protected interest of litigants, while protecting the health and safety of employees, stakeholders, and the public. Until regular court operations are restored, **no children are permitted in Court on abuse or neglect cases. If Foster Parents wish to participate in Court hearings they shall appear by phone. Please contact the Children's Court Attorney or Guardian ad litem for call in information.**

Until further notice, permanency hearings and judicial review hearings will occur by phone, but custody hearings and adjudications will still require parties and attorneys to appear. CHILDREN SHOULD NOT BE IN COURT FOR ANY CHILD WELFARE HEARINGS. Children may appear by phone.

If a child has a juvenile delinquency hearing, their presence in person will be required but family/youth should contact the Public Defender or child's delinquency attorney for updates on Court hearings. Please keep monitoring updates from the judiciary and CYFD.

Following the Governor's mandate for teleworking, CYFD employees who do not provide direct service will be working full time while utilizing video conferencing and other telework measures to continue business as usual. Accordingly, all non-essential meetings and conferences that were planned to be hosted by CYFD or by partners within CYFD buildings are being moved to video conferencing where possible or are being postponed indefinitely. If you are involved in any of these meetings, you will receive information directly from the meeting or event organizer(s). We are working closely with the courts to keep safe and sanitary practices as cases continue. We will do our best to announce canceled events via email and on our news page located at <https://cyfd.org/news-events/news>.

Overall updates on the COVID-19 outbreak in New Mexico are available on the DOH COVID-19 page, <http://cv.nmhealth.org> and the state is manning a 24/7, toll-free hotline at 1-855-600-3453.

We absolutely understand that these changes will have deep impact on foster families and families across New Mexico. Both CYFD and the Governor's office would not take extraordinary measures if they were not necessary. In the face of this global pandemic, we are doing everything we possibly can to minimize the harm to people in our state. Updates and changes are coming in by the hour. Please stay alert to outreach from the department to stay on top of timely changes.

Our Department is here to answer your questions and concerns. Though this is an absolute priority, our staff are working around the clock to work with responses to contain the virus.

Thank you for your diligence in helping to keep the COVID-19 outbreak contained in New Mexico. If you believe anyone in your family or a youth in your care is exhibiting symptoms, please call the DOH COVID-19 hotline 24/7, toll-free hotline at 1-855-600-3453 immediately. Please do not show up unannounced at your doctor's office and do not go to the ER unless you are experiencing a medical emergency. The Department of Health is working on drive-thru testing clinics statewide in the coming days as the state's ability to test for the virus ramps up.

Well wishes,

Secretary Brian Blalock