

State of New Mexico

CHILDREN, YOUTH and FAMILIES DEPARTMENT

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Dear Caregiver,

We hope this letter finds you and your families doing well. We'd like to provide you an update on the current processes and protocols for visits and with new information and resources to help you remain informed about the ongoing response to COVID-19 in New Mexico.

Public Closures: In order to reduce the spread, NM DOH has enacted increasing measures of prevention and protection. We are including some of this information in this letter. Some of this information may feel repetitive. We are making efforts to communicate the most important information as often as possible to all of you.

The current measures that NM DOH has instituted for public protection from COVID-19 include the closing of all public schools statewide until April 6th, limiting the number of customers at restaurants and other public places to no more than 50% usual capacity, and guidelines limiting seating of patrons in restaurants to no more than 6 individuals per table. Additionally, all gatherings of 50 or more people in an enclosed space have been canceled for at least 8 weeks, per recommendations distributed March 15th by the Centers for Disease Control.

Personal Precautions: Social distancing, a behavior that has proven effective in other countries as a public health preventative measure for slowing the rate of COVID-19 infections, is at the root of each of these major decisions. At its most basic, social distancing refers to efforts to maintain a space of at least 6 feet around each person at any given time. We have included with this letter an information sheet on preventive actions every person can take to enhance their own and others' protection from COVID-19. For everyone, the basics of washing hands often with soap and warm water and cleaning common surfaces are still best practices to prevent the spread of this virus.

Dept. of Health Hotline & Website: The New Mexico Department of Health has developed a website dedicated to providing the public with COVID-19 news, general information, and hotline numbers to both speak to a health professional for consultation on symptoms and for general information, including updates on the number of New Mexicans tested and the results of those tests. The NM DOH website can be found at the following link: <https://cv.nmhealth.org/>. The hotline numbers are:

- To Speak with a Health Professional: 1-855-600-3453 (Available 24/7)
- For Resources and General Information: 1-833-551-0518

PULLTOGETHER.ORG

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 for assessment and guidance.

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 medical professionals will provide you with guidance on next steps, including whether and where to go should you need further, in-person medical attention. This triage system is being implemented in order to minimize overwhelm at hospitals and doctors' offices and to ensure patients receive the best possible care in order of need.

The Department of Health, hospitals, and community health providers are working to stand up more drive-through testing clinics statewide in the coming days as the state's ability to test for the virus ramps up.

CYFD Visits: CYFD is committed to the safety, health and welfare of the children, youth and families we serve and to that of our workers. This includes our responsibility to provide the critical, court-and federal mandated direct services to you and to the children in your care, including child visits and family visits. In doing this, we have directed our staff to take the cleaning, hygiene, social distancing and other precautionary measures outlined by the New Mexico Department of Health to help prevent anyone, including children, contracting the virus. The following are the directions workers have received:

- Before initiating a visit of any type, case workers must ask questions about the health, age and travel history of people with whom they or the child are visiting.
 - In cases where an individual has traveled outside of the country, visits will not take place until the person(s) have contacted the New Mexico Department of Health and followed the protocols they are given.
 - In cases where an individual is at increased risk for complications from COVID-19, based on age and health conditions, workers will visit with the child without that individual present.
- Workers have been instructed to conduct visits in community as often as possible so that they can practice social distancing. Office visits are only happening as exceptions at this time.
 - When visiting, workers have been instructed to wash hands and use hand sanitizer before approaching the home(s) and after the visit is completed.
 - Whenever possible, visits are to happen in the community and in areas where social distancing can be best practiced.
- Workers are also instructing families on the protocols of social distancing, hand washing, cleaning "high touch" surfaces such as door handles, faucets, telephones, and providing them with the attached posters for reference.
- Workers in our offices are implementing social distancing with colleagues. All individuals who can complete their work from home have been instructed to do so. Under exceptional circumstances where office visits must happen, visiting rooms are being cleaned after each visit and at the end of the day with enhanced regimens.

- Workers who have traveled are following the direction from DOH regarding self isolation or quarantine. Workers are told to stay home if they are ill.

Court Visits: We realize many families have involvement with the Courts. Families are encouraged to visit nmcourts.gov to locate specific information for the courts with which they have contact. The following is a bit of general information and updates about court operations.

At this time, certain non-urgent court appointments have been postponed. Court visits may take place via teleconference or videoconference. Where in person hearings are necessary (where time limits are at issue) the court will practice Social Distancing.

No one should attend court in person if they are showing signs of illness or meeting high risk criteria as outlined by the Department of Health. High-risk criteria include health concerns such as asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure or high cholesterol or any condition or treatment that compromises the immune system. Telephonic appearances are permitted in this circumstance.

Young children are not permitted into courts at this time. Youth who are scheduled for discharge hearings are encouraged to appear in court with their youth attorney but may choose to appear via videoconference.

No Adjudication or TPR will proceed without an ICWA representative on ICWA cases. Please be aware that many tribes and pueblos have closed. CYFD shall ensure QEW is available for any hearing or file an appropriate motion. If a tribal member is not available for a permanency or judicial review hearing, the Department will be required to put language in any Court order that the tribe may reopen the hearing by request made within 30 days. The Department shall immediately email the tribal representative the same information. Tribes may have additional time to reopen if they demonstrate they were unable to receive such information due to closure.

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.

For specific information about your court cases, please contact your Children's Court Attorney or Guardian ad litem. Please also visit nmcourts.gov for additional information.

Free School Meals: While school is not in session for students, the Early Childhood Education and Care Department, the Public Education Department and CYFD recognize that many families rely on school meals for their children. ECECD and PED have received a waiver from the USDA to keep school kitchens open for the time period that schools are closed in order for their staff to prepare "Meals to Go" for any child in New Mexico who needs food during this time. The link below will take you to a website where you can download a list of every school state-wide that is currently providing Meals to Go. <https://www.newmexico.gov/education/meal-sites-for-children/>

Children must be with their caregivers in order to receive meals, but families can pick up more than one meal at a time so they can limit visits and may do so at any public school that is convenient for them, not only at the child's regular school.

Childcare: Your family may have increased childcare needs due to school closures. The Early Childhood Education and Care Department is encouraging childcare centers to continue to provide childcare. Federal guidelines require states to stand up childcare services during states of emergency. *We encourage families that are able to do so to keep children at home with them in an effort to help ensure that families absolutely needing childcare at this time can access the service.*

The state has a **Childcare Resource and Referral** phone line to help families find childcare. That phone number is **1-800-691-9067**. Families may also visit www.NewMexicoKids.org for a list of childcare facilities (continually being updated), to search for a particular childcare facility, for information on expanded childcare during this crisis, and for a guide on how to become an emergency childcare provider.

For Families Currently Receiving Childcare Supports: Families can also contact their CYFD eligibility specialist via phone or email to let them know they now need full-time care; our team across the state will amend the contracts. In addition, all parents receiving childcare assistance will have their copays waived during the public health emergency.

Protecting CYFD Child Care Assistance Benefits for Families: Families who choose to keep their children home during the emergency will *not* lose their CYFD benefits. If a childcare center closes and families need services, they may transfer their childcare benefits to an alternative CYFD-approved provider -- and the state will continue paying subsidies to *both* providers.

Volunteering & Other Opportunities to Help: Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham has provided information on a variety of ways that every person and that families can help during this time. For community donation needs, including food banks and blood centers, volunteer opportunities and guidance for prevention and self-care, please visit: <https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2020/03/17/heres-how-you-can-help-during-covid-19/>.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation as New Mexico takes the extraordinary measures to help minimize the COVID-19 outbreak in New Mexico. We understand that these changes are challenging and have deep impacts 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 to control this pandemic.

We will continue to provide updates to you as this situation is rapidly evolving. Please stay alert to outreach from the department to stay on top of timely changes. We are here to answer your questions and concerns.

Thank you for your diligence in helping to keep the COVID-19 outbreak contained in New Mexico.

Well wishes,

Secretary Brian Blalock