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TO: Division of Child Protection/  
Family Service Unit

FROM: Frank Cresciullo - Chief Operating Officer  
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DATE: April 2, 2020

RE: Emergency Guidance for Family Services during the COVID19 Pandemic

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In light of the COVID19 pandemic, we are providing updated guidance to assist our Family Services Units (FSU) in conducting required family engagements and ongoing assessment of children's safety, care, and wellbeing.

Effective immediately, FSU CPS will follow this interim guidance for COVID19 field response.

#### **FSU Home visits and client contact**

ACS policy requires that all families under Court Ordered Supervision (COS) receive at least two successful contacts each month, one of which must be a home visit.

Due to the current pandemic, FSU staff will be required to conduct only one face to face contact per month, when it is safe to arrange an in-person visit, with a second contact being conducted via phone or video conference.

In cases where the court's order requires more than one home visit per month, FSU staff must contact the Family Court Legal Services (FCLS) attorney to discuss whether a phone or video conference with the family satisfies that requirement.

To further promote social distancing, in-person visits are temporarily suspended for children in the care of the non-respondent parent/ guardian. In such cases visits should be conducted by phone or video conference. In cases where the court has ordered ACS to visit the non-respondent home, the FSU staff must contact the FCLS attorney to discuss whether a phone or video conference with the family satisfies that requirement.

In person visits may still be conducted for children in the care of the non-respondent if CPS staff determine that the parent/guardian has low protective

capacity and may be allowing the respondent parent in the home.

In cases where the child is in the care of the respondent parent/ guardian, one monthly face to face visit must be maintained, when it is safe to do so. The required face to face monthly contact will be conducted when FSU CPS can determine that the family is not exhibiting any symptoms of the Covid19 virus.

In order to assess the family's health status, FSU staff will contact the family in advance of the monthly home visit by phone and ask the following questions:

1. Does anyone in your household have symptoms of a respiratory infection (e.g. cough, sore throat, fever, shortness of breath), and
2. Has anyone in your household been directed to self-isolate or self-quarantine by a medical professional?

If the parent or caregiver answers "no" to both advance screening questions (i.e. reports that no one in the household has symptoms and they have not been directed to self-isolate or self-quarantine) then the CPS can arrange an in-person visit. However, the CPS must practice social distancing during the home visit, maintaining a distance of 6 feet, and asking the parents to bring the children to the door for observation and assessment. If the CPS staff determines that entering the home is necessary for further assessment, the CDC's guidelines for infection control (see below) and every effort must be made to keep a safe distance from the family while in the home.

CDC Guidelines:

- [Infection Control Basics](#)
- [Hand Hygiene in Health Care Settings](#)
- [Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives](#)

If the parent or caregiver answers "yes" to either of the above questions, the CPS must:

- Direct the parent or caregiver to remain at home with their household members and contact their medical professional, if they haven't already done so
- Assist the client by contacting 911 if emergency assistance is needed
- If the parent or caregiver needs help finding contact information for their medical provider/doctor, case planners should try to assist by conducting online searches.

- If the family does not have a primary care doctor or has been unable to reach their doctor, the family should contact 311.
- In all circumstances, instruct the client or family member to notify the receiving medical provider and any transporter, in advance, of potential concern for COVID-19.

FSU CPS should contact the FCLS attorney assigned to the case to discuss the parent/ guardian's illness and decide if a face to face visit is necessary. If the FSU CPS and the FCLS attorney agree that a face to face visit is needed, the FSU staff must determine the safest course of action with their borough and central office leadership. FSU CPS may also contact the OCFH Hotline 833-935-2279 for direction on how to proceed.

If the FSU CPS cannot contact the family after three attempts a visit should be made to the home and the above screening questions asked from a safe distance from outside the home. The FSU CPS should then proceed as per above based on the family's response.

When a child assessment is conducted at the family's door while maintaining social distance the following assessment should be conducted:

- Observe the child(ren) for marks/bruises
- Ask the parent/caretaker for an opportunity to talk with the child alone and assess for safety
- Reassess parent/caretaker's protective capacity
- Inquire about changes or concerns in the home
- Determine if there are new service needs or follow up supportive intervention needed

If a parent refuses to produce the children at the door the FSU CPS supervisor should contact FCLS and FCLS will decide whether to seek an access order. If the situation presents as imminent danger the CPS should call 911 for NYPD assistance.

### **Denial of Entry into a Home**

When a family denies access of a child to FSU CPS on the grounds that they are concerned the worker may expose them to COVID19, the CPS must ask the parent/caretaker to produce the child(ren) at the door.

Keeping social distancing:

- Observe the child(ren) for marks/bruises
- Ask the parent/caretaker for an opportunity to talk with the child

alone and assess for imminent danger.

If there **are** imminent safety concerns noted or observed, CPS is to seek support from law enforcement by calling 911.

### **Removal of Children Known or Suspected to Have COVID-19**

Should it become necessary for CPS to remove a child due to child protective reasons, and the child or family member are presenting symptoms of COVID19, CPS must contact law enforcement by calling 911 to seek assistance with the removal. CPS must alert law enforcement that someone in the home is presenting symptoms of COVID 19. CPS will remain outside the location until NYPD/EMS responds. FSU CPS may also contact OCFH Hotline 833-935-2279 for direction on how to proceed.

### **Transportation for removals with a child with symptoms/confirmed diagnoses of COVID 19**

CPS or CPM will call transportation at the following number: (646) 935-7274, and advise the dispatcher that there are special transportation needs and provide the following information:

- Location
- Child's Name
- Staff Name
- Destination
- Known symptoms - so that the driver can take precautions

Upon completion of the call the formal trip authorization should be submitted through the portal.

**All child(ren) who have symptoms or confirmed diagnosis of COVID19 are to be placed at the children center unless otherwise directed.**

### **Children Center placement notification for a child(ren) with symptoms/confirmed diagnoses of COVID 19**

- The Deputy Director will call intake at the following number:
  - **(646) 935-1411**
- Ask to speak to a supervisor, provide supervisor with child's information and known symptoms so that an isolation room can be identified and prepared.
- A separate CC notification mailbox has been created, the DD will send the removal/placement notification to the following email address: [acs.dl.FPS.CCMedicalNotificationtoC19@acs.nyc.gov](mailto:acs.dl.FPS.CCMedicalNotificationtoC19@acs.nyc.gov) so that the relevant stakeholders are aligned on the next steps.

### **Court Ordered Supervision Cases**

In cases where the court has ordered ACS to supervise visits and those visits normally take place at ACS locations:

All efforts will be made to conduct such visits via phone or video conference, with the agreement of the parent or guardian. If the parent or guardian insists on a face to face visit, FSU CPS must first try and arrange the visit in the community, i.e. parks or other open settings, in order to maintain a social distance of at least 6 feet. If supervising the visit in the community is not possible, then the visit must be supervised at an ACS location that allows the observation of the visit from a safe distance. Ideally this should occur by ACS staff observing the visit from outside the visit room, perhaps through a viewing window or glass panel when available.

In all cases the health/risk questions need to be asked of parents prior to the visit and extra precautions taken even when the parent/ guardian report no COVID19 like symptoms, maintaining 6 feet of distance, regular hand washing, and wearing gloves when available.

If a parent/guardian reports that they are experiencing COVID19 symptoms, supervised visits may only take place by phone or video.

### **Court Order Supervision (COS) with Prevention Services**

In cases where prevention services are in place, it is very important for FSU CPS and case planners to collaborate and coordinate around visitation. If a child is assessed to be at high risk in terms of child welfare concerns and is in a home where a household member has symptoms of COVID-19 or have been instructed to self-isolate, CPS in collaboration with prevention case planners and supervisors, should weigh the health risks versus child welfare risks and consult with FCLS as needed. If the child welfare risks can be addressed using technology, FSU CPS and case planners should conduct the visit via a phone or video conference.

If the child welfare risks cannot be addressed via phone or video, including but not limited to serious domestic violence concerns where the presence of the person causing harm could not be determined during a video call, FSU CPS and case planners should conduct in-person visits in a location accessible to all parties where social distancing can be maintained and while taking the health precautions identified in this guidance.

If the parent or caregiver answers “no” to the advance screening questions (i.e. reports that no one in the household has symptoms and they have not been directed to self-isolate or self-quarantine) then the FSU CPS and case planner must arrange an in-person meeting as needed for all COS Prevention cases.

### **Family Conferences Schedule and Participation:**

All FSU transfer conference, 45 Days Meetings, Service Plan Review, and Follow Up Child Safety Conference and any further collaborative meetings with other stakeholders until further notice are to occur by phone or video conference.

- To secure the best conference outcome, FSU will coordinate and invite all Service Providers with the Family and their extended support system.
- FSU leadership and CPS will document in CNNX the outcome of all of the conferences

To support FSU with additional guidance, for Case Transfer from PD to FSU, please review the attached Family Service Unit Transfer Summary Checklist.



