

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19):
Guidance for Visitation in Residential Settings Licensed by the
Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) in the Green Phase
of the Process to Reopen Pennsylvania
Updated ODP Announcement 20-066

AUDIENCE:

Individuals, families and designated persons, licensed and enrolled providers of ODP residential services, and all interested parties.

PURPOSE:

To provide guidance on establishing visitation policies in residential settings when a county transitions to the Green Phase of Governor Wolf's [Process to Reopen Pennsylvania](#). Residential settings include licensed and unlicensed community homes (55 Pa. Code Chapter 6400) and licensed and unlicensed family living homes (55 Pa. Code Chapter 6500).

DISCUSSION:

Governor Wolf's Process to Reopen Pennsylvania includes a strategic three-phase, color-coded matrix to determine when counties are ready to begin easing some restrictions on work, congregate settings, and social interactions. On May 13, 2020, ODP released [ODP Announcement 20-052 Update](#), which provided updated guidance for rendering services in "Yellow Phase" counties and included information about visitor restrictions in residential settings.

Per the Governor's Process to Reopen Pennsylvania, homes located in counties in the "Green Phase" may lift visitation restrictions in certain congregate care settings using the guidance provided in this document.

ODP recognizes that many families and persons designated by individuals who live in residential settings are eager to resume in-person visits with their friends and loved ones and fully encourages all providers in counties in the Green Phase to resume in-person visits as soon as possible. However, ODP also acknowledges that providers must

remain diligent in their efforts to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, especially in residential settings that support individuals at higher risk for contracting the virus.

In light of the above, ODP offers the following guidance to assist providers in developing procedures that allow for in-person visits in a safe and judicious manner.

Visits That Occur Inside the Home

Residential providers should establish or update a written “Visitation Policy” for in-person visits. This policy should be shared with all individuals and persons designated by the individual.

The Visitation Policy should include, at a minimum:

- Scheduling in-person visits in advance of the visit
- Establishing “visiting hours” for in-person visits
- Limiting the number of visitors who may enter the home per individual, e.g., no more than two visitors at any time
- Requiring social distancing
- Staggering visitation times such that only one individual receives in-person visits at any given time
- Restricting visits that take place in the home to areas that reduce contact with other individuals, e.g., the individual’s bedroom or an outdoor area on the premises
- Requiring visitors to wear cloth or surgical masks when present in the home and continue hand washing practices when practicable or use hand sanitizer
- Prohibiting visitors from entering any home where individuals who are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 reside. For Life Sharing homes, this includes host families and any other individuals who reside in the home. Information about people who are at higher risk for severe illness is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>
- Prohibiting any visits from people who are:
 - Currently diagnosed with COVID-19
 - Have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 in the 14 days prior to the visit
 - Are demonstrating symptoms of COVID-19 or any other illness

- A plan for implementing screening procedures for visitors, such as taking each visitor's temperature using a no-touch thermometer and asking if the visitor is experiencing shortness of breath or has a cough. Residential service providers should reference [Guidance on Masks, Screening and Handwashing](#) for additional information regarding screening procedures
- A statement that the Visitation Policy may be modified based on future changes to visitation guidance issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Health or ODP

Visits that Occur Outside the Home

Not all visits will occur inside the home; some visitors may wish to take individuals on community outings that will not include visitors' physical presence in the home. For visits outside the home, providers should encourage individuals and visitors to:

- Be aware of and comply with Governor Wolf's [Green Phase social restrictions](#)
- Wear cloth or surgical masks when within six feet of others
- Continue to practice social distancing
- Select outdoor activities that will minimize exposure to other people such as visiting a park or other open areas
- Continue hand washing practices when practicable or use hand sanitizer

Providers should discourage community outings in counties that have not transitioned to the Green Phase.

- Some individuals may wish to participate in a home visit with their family. Providers should establish a written policy for visits to a family home. This policy should include at a minimum: Prior to the individual leaving the residence, the provider will conduct a screening of those people with whom the individual will have contact during the home visit. The policy should indicate the COVID-19 screening questions that will be asked. Providers should update the screening questions as necessary to reflect best practice for screening questions for COVID-19.
- The provider will ensure that the individual and family are aware of Governor Wolf's [Green Phase social restrictions and encourage the individual and family to comply with them.](#)
- Prior to the individual's return to the residential setting, the provider will complete a COVID-19 screening for the individual, remotely, within 24 hours of the planned return.

- Upon the individual's return to the residence, the provider will complete a COVID-19 screening.
- If the individual is symptomatic or has had a known exposure to COVID-19 during the family visit, the provider will immediately quarantine the individual until such time as:
 - A negative COVID-19 test result is received from a test given to the individual after their return to the residential setting; or
 - The individual remains without symptoms and meets the PAHAN 504–UPD criteria to be released from quarantine.
- If the individual is symptomatic, the provider will test the individual for COVID-19 as soon as possible.

Providers should discourage home visits to counties that are not in the Green Phase.

Facilitating Personal Relationships

When in-person visitation must continue to be restricted to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, Residential Habilitation and Life Sharing providers (including Life Sharing hosts) are responsible to facilitate ongoing communication between individuals, family members, friends, and anyone else the individual chooses to communicate with during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unless otherwise indicated by the individual, the expectation is that communication with family and friends is supported on a regular and routine basis for each individual.

The provider must offer assistance to the individual to communicate with friends and family, when needed. The provider may need to assist the individual with learning new ways to communicate with the people he or she has relationships with. The provider should be creative in ways that assist the individual to remain in contact with family and friends and feel comfortable with the method of communication. A few examples include:

- Arranging a meeting that occurs between an individual or family/friends viewing each other through a window or glass door, so that social distancing guidelines can be followed
- Using technology such as FaceTime, Skype, Zoom meetings, Facebook, Messenger, etc. Promoting communication through telephone calls, email, writing letters, texting, sending photographs or videos, or the use of virtual assistant technology (ex. Amazon's Alexa or Google Home)

Homes that have access to the internet are expected to offer the individual access to a computer for the use of technology. If the individual resides in his or her own home and does not have internet access, the provider should assist the individual to access an existing account free of charge or determine if there is a reasonable accommodation that can be made. Per ODP's regulations, the provision of internet services is included as part of room and board for Residential Habilitation services or Life Sharing Homes that are not owned by the individual.

In homes that provide services to more than one individual, access to items such as computers, smart phones or tablets may need a schedule to allow everyone access to their preferred method of contact. Program Specialists, Direct Support Professionals, or Life Sharing hosts should collaborate with individuals and family/friends in order to plan available time to communicate.

Person-Centered Planning and Support

Residential providers have a responsibility to identify any skills the individuals need to acquire or practice to participate in desired in-person visits and assist individuals in learning skills. This includes learning how to practice social distancing, wear masks, and hand washing protocols. The following websites have helpful resources to assist with these activities:

- <https://aidinpa.org/>
- <https://paautism.org/resource/coronavirus-resources/>

Contact

Please contact the ODP Regional Office with any questions about this announcement.