



**STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES**

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May 22, 2020

To: Child Welfare Field Operations

From: Jody Becker, Deputy Secretary *Jody Becker*

RE: Family Time and Sibling and Relative Visits Interim Policy

This memo will serve as interim policy guidance related to policy [4254 - Family Time and Sibling and Relative Visits](#).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and a declaration of emergency at both the state and national levels, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) has taken additional steps to safeguard the health of the children and families it serves.

In accordance with state laws and regulations, visitation is the right of the family in cases where visitation is in the best interests of the child per RCW 13.34.136(2)(b)(ii)(A). However, visitation may be limited or denied if the dependency court determines that such limitation or denial is necessary to protect the child's health, safety, or welfare per RCW 13.34.136(2)(b)(ii)(C).

Gov. Jay Inslee's [Proclamation 20.33](#) gave the Department the flexibility to utilize remote technology to ensure visits could safely continue between children and their families amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 26, 2020, to balance both public health and the needs of children and families related to visitation, DCYF made temporary policy and implementation changes to align with the continued "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" orders. The temporary policy did not suspend in-person visits but focused on options to conduct visitation remotely using technology.

As the state begins to open up, DCYF is committed to moving back to in-person Family Time visits. Based on consultation with the Department of Health (DOH), we are confident that some children can safely return to in-person visits. DCYF is working to reinstate in-person visits, but in light of other limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic, visits may still be provided through a combination of remote and in-person visits.

In order to ensure the health and safety of children, families, parents, and caregivers, DOH has provided guidance and protocols to make visitation as safe as possible for all participants. DCYF has developed [Family Time In-Person Visitation Guidance - DCYF Staff](#) that takes into account critical safety considerations to support transitioning back to in-person visitation and what to do if safety protocols cannot be met. DCYF staff need to adhere to the process and procedures as outlined in the staff guidance document. The guidance provides details regarding:

- Consideration of [High Risk Populations for Serious Health Problems from COVID-19](#).
- Asking parent and the foster parent / caregiver the [CDC and DOH Screening Guideline Questions](#) prior to the beginning of a visit and prior to transportation.
- Safety protocols during the in-person visitation such as wearing mask or cloth face coverings and washing hands.
- Transportation guidance such as mask use, cleaning, and transporting one household at a time.
- Cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting instruction from DOH.

If it is determined that it is unsafe to continue with a visit in person, the case worker or the Family Time Provider shall:

- (1) Offer to change the visit from in-person to remote. If the remote visit is not an option;
- (2) Cancel the visit, reschedule, and problem solve with the case worker and team.

If the Family Time provider must reschedule or cancel an in-person visit due to something related to COVID-19 (as outlined in the guidance document), they will reach out to the case worker within one business day.

If in-person visits would be detrimental to the child's health, safety, or welfare, the social worker will consult with their counsel about whether to pursue a motion to modify visits. Reasons in-person visits may be detrimental to the child's health, safety, or welfare include, but are not limited to: if the child, caregiver, or a person in the caregiver's home is high risk and the visit presents a risk to the child's health or the stability of the child's placement; if a parent, child, or a person in the caregiver's or parent's home may be positive for COVID-19 based on responses to the DOH screening questions; and if personal protective equipment such as face masks and adequate cleaning supplies are not available and the child's health or placement stability is at risk as a result.

If a dependency court orders the Department to provide in-person visits over the Department's objections, regardless of lack of available PPE and other health measures, the contracted Family Time Provider and/or case worker may provide these in-person visits. If in-person or remote visitation are not options for some reason, then the caseworker and supervisor will need to problem solve with the child's team, including parent attorneys.

Additional visitation guidance and protocols have been developed for others involved in Family Time visitation (links below):

[Family Time In-Person Visit Protocol - Provider Information](#)  
[Family Time In-Person Visit Protocol - Foster Parents and Caregivers](#)  
[Family Time In-Person Visit Protocol - Parents](#)

For questions, contact Deanna Morrison, Permanency Planning/Visitation Program Manager at [Deanna.Morrison@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:Deanna.Morrison@dcyf.wa.gov).