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COVID-19: Revised Interim Visitation Guidance for Certified Residential Facilities

Background:

On March 14, 2020 OPWDD issued a Health Advisory: COVID-19 Cases in Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities which suspended visitors within Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICF/IID). The advisory also described requirements for the allowance of patient support persons. On March 18, 2020, OPWDD issued a Health Advisory: COVID-19 Guidance for Operators of Individualized Residential Alternatives (IRAs), Community Residences (CRs) and Private Schools Regarding Visitation, which suspended visitors within IRAs, CRs and Private Schools. ICF/IIDs, IRAs, CRs, and Private Schools are collectively referred to herein as “Certified Residential Facilities.”

Accompanied by strong infection prevention and control requirements, these policies aim to safeguard and maintain the health and wellbeing of residents and staff, while containing and preventing the spread of COVID-19 during the State’s initial growth phase of the pandemic. After the successful efforts of New Yorkers to flatten the curve and reduce virus transmission, OPWDD recognizes the need for sustainable visitation policies for certified residential facilities for the next phase of the public health emergency.

Visitation In Certified Residential Facilities

The separation of residents from their loved ones can cause significant stress and anxiety, and new strategies are needed going forward to extend the opportunity to visit residents of certified residential facilities in a manner that continues to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the health and wellbeing of residents, staff, and visitors. Certified residential facilities shall expand visitation under this revised guidance if able to continue following the core principles of infection control and prevention, as follows:

- Residents in isolation or observation, and residents with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 status, irrespective of vaccination status, should not have visitors outside of compassionate care or end-of-life situations;
- Individuals who have been fully vaccinated should not be prohibited from visiting on or offsite as a result of exposure to COVID-19, so long as they remain asymptomatic. Fully vaccinated, for purposes of this guidance, is defined as being 2 or more weeks after the

final dose (e.g., first for Janssen/Johnson & Johnson, second for Pfizer and Moderna) of the vaccine approved by the FDA or authorized by the FDA for emergency use.

- Facilities shall set appropriate hours during which visitation may occur, based upon the size and needs of the home, staffing available, and ability to implement appropriate disinfection between visits;
- All visits must be scheduled ahead of time and approved by the provider agency. Visits shall be staggered so as not to have multiple families visiting in a shared space at one time and to ensure adequate time to clean any common areas or high touch surfaces between visits.
- Number of visitors per resident should be limited based on the size of the facility and space allocated within the home for visits;
- Facilities should consider scheduling visits for a specified length of time to help ensure all residents are able to receive visitors;
- All other residents should be notified ahead of time that visitors will be present and advised how to remain socially distant from them;
- Providers should thoroughly discuss the potential risks and benefits of the visitor's presence with the visitor and the resident ahead of a scheduled visit;
- Visitors should be limited and, where multiple visitors are permitted, then such visitors should be, to the extent possible, members of the same family or household;
- All visitors should be 18 years of age or older, except in rare exceptions as determined by the facility;
- Prior to each scheduled visit, visitors must undergo symptom and temperature checks by facility staff and shall be denied visitation if they report any COVID-19 exposure or symptoms during the prior 14 days, or have a temperature over 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit;
- Visitors must be provided a face mask if they do not arrive with one and that mask must be properly worn throughout the entirety of the visit when social distancing cannot be maintained;
- Visitors who refuse to wear a face mask must be asked to leave the facility;
- Visitors must sanitize their hands upon arrival and perform meticulous hand hygiene throughout the visit;
- Visitation is encouraged to occur outdoors if weather permits, with masks worn by all parties when social distancing cannot be maintained;
- Visitation exercised inside the facility shall only occur in a designated area where disinfection, social distancing, and separation from other residents can be safely implemented;

- Visits may occur in single bedrooms, ideally. Visitors must remain in the resident's room throughout the visit except when directed by staff to leave;
- Visitation must not occur with any individuals who are currently in mandatory quarantine or isolation;
- Any areas of the facility utilized by the visitor(s) shall be disinfected immediately following the visit; and
- Facilities shall maintain a daily log of all visitors, which shall include names and contact information, as well as the location within the facility/property that visitation occurred.

All facilities shall allow visitation under this guidance unless otherwise prohibited by directive of OPWDD or the NYS DOH or local department of health. Providers may not impose additional restrictions without specific authority by DOH or OPWDD.