

LETTER TO FAMILIES



March 31, 2022

Dear DDDS Families and Service Recipients,

As the saying goes, hope springs eternal- and I'm certainly feeling that way as we move into sunnier, warmer days and the pandemic having less of a hold on our lives. This month's update is even better than February's! Each week we get closer and closer to experiencing life more reminiscent of what it was like before we ever heard about COVID. For over two years, we've learned to adapt and navigate the world in a limited fashion. I'm feeling rejuvenated at the opportunities that lay before us.

COVID-19 Cases

New cases in our network have stabilized tremendously, as well as around the state. Since February 22nd, we have had eight Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) test positive, bringing the total to 1,117. There have been five additional cases among service recipients supported in residential habilitation as well, bringing the total to 598.

Things Are A-Changing

We are moving towards a time where COVID-19 is among us, but not dictating or restricting our lives. There were several modifications and restrictions to services that we had to implement quickly as the Public Health Emergency took hold in Delaware. As we've done throughout the pandemic, DDDS will continue to keep you updated on the easing of restrictions and resumption of services that will impact our service recipients and our provider network.

As you recall, in-person visits by DDDS employees, Consultative Nursing and Behavior Analysts, Columbus Community Navigators and MCO Care Coordinators resumed in February. I know what a welcome sight it is for everyone to re-engage in-person again. As the CDC guidance changed in early March, we have been able to move towards having service recipients no longer being required to wear face masks while in their day programs. Of course, face masks are still encouraged and supported for anyone who wants to wear one. With this change we have not observed a spike in new cases, so we are able to move to the next logical step of reducing social distancing down from six feet to three feet. This will go into effect on April 4, 2022. This social distancing reduction will allow more service recipients to return to in-person programming since it increases occupancy capacity in program sites. Please reach out to your Support Coordinator, Columbus Community Navigator, Family Resource Coordinator or your Employment Navigator to discuss your interest in returning to program as space permits.

Additionally, starting on April 1st, we will remove the need to schedule visits in advance at your loved one's home if they live in a provider-managed residential site. It is still best practice to call in advance to ensure no one is currently in quarantine, but with the dramatic reduction in new cases, it seems appropriate to get things back to the pre-pandemic way as much as possible. Obviously if a housemate is in quarantine for COVID, no outside visitors will be permitted during that time period.

Masks are still required on public transportation until at least April 18th. If you or your loved one uses Paratransit to attend their job or day program and they cannot wear a mask, you may file for a medical exemption with Paratransit. You need a letter from your/your loved one's physician stating they cannot wear a mask. The letter needs to be sent to lori.yeager@delaware.gov. She will review the request and let you know the determination.

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and anyone interacting in-person with service recipients are still required to wear masks throughout the month of April. We are deliberately making changes in stages, so we can swiftly adjust if necessary. Here's hoping the only changes going forward are less restrictive!

Testing and Vaccination Opportunities

Many of our providers continue to use Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) routinely to identify asymptomatic cases of COVID, among staff and service recipients. Having access to test results in 15 minutes has helped ensure operations can continue safely as we make our way through the pandemic.

Curative sites continue to offer testing throughout the state. You can visit www.curative.com to find a site and schedule an appointment. The State also provides a listing of additional testing options, including free at-home test kits, at de.gov/gettested.

Please get vaccinated and your booster dose if you have not already. You can find vaccine information and locations at de.gov/getmyvaccine. The booster rate for Delaware is alarmingly low. Please consider getting your booster dose if you are eligible and have not yet done so. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this week, approved second booster doses for all people 65 or older and for those age 50 or older who have underlying medical conditions that put them at high risk for severe COVID-19. Intellectual/developmental disabilities is a diagnosis listed as an underlying medical condition. Second booster doses can be administered four months after the first booster was received.

At-home vaccinations are available throughout Delaware. DHSS has partnered with independent pharmacies in each county to deliver the vaccinations to eligible Delawareans 5 and older and their caregivers. Operators staff the toll-free line (1-888-491-4988) from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays. To learn more, visit DHSS' website at VaccineAccessDE.com.

Planning for the Future

DDDS employees continue to be dedicated to helping service recipients live their good lives. DDDS offices remain open, but please note many employees are now working a hybrid schedule with some days in the office and some days telecommuting. You can continue to reach them via phone or email as usual. Please check which days they're in the office before arriving, to save yourself a trip.

Our provider network continues to actively recruit more direct support professionals to meet service recipients' needs. Every provider agency is currently hiring, so please encourage anyone interested to reach out or apply. The sooner our providers can hire and onboard staff, the more service recipients they can bring back in person.

Here's looking towards the future and less COVID-19 restrictions. I am excited and hopeful for what the month of April brings us; and eager to share additional good news going forward. Thanks for your continued partnership and patience.

Be well,



Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP
Director of Community Services