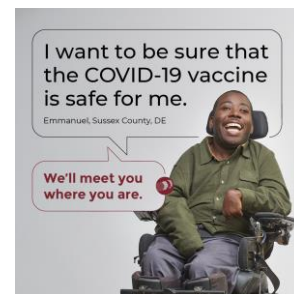


LETTER TO FAMILIES



June 28, 2022

Dear DDDS Families and Service Recipients,

I hope the start of the summer finds you well and having a chance to live your good lives, when it's not too hot outside. As I've done throughout the pandemic, I want to update you on where the DDDS network is in context of COVID-19 response and efforts.

COVID-19 Cases

In the past month, we have continued to see the number of new COVID-19 positives cases drop across the state and in the DDDS system. Since my last letter, we've had just about half-as-many cases as the prior month! Amongst Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), we had 29 new cases, bringing the total to 1236 throughout the pandemic. Amongst service recipients receiving residential habilitation services, we've had 21 new cases, bringing the total to 603 throughout the pandemic.

This steady decline is really promising and I'm hopeful it's a sign of case rates stabilizing.

Operational Updates

Face masks continue to be required for all in-person interactions with service recipients. Masking will continue to be required for DSPs until the state of Delaware falls into the low transmission rate category according to the CDC. The map of community transmission rates is updated every Thursday. As of last week, New Castle County was in the low (green) zone, while Kent and Sussex were in the medium (yellow) zone. The CDC recommends wearing a mask indoors in public for areas in the high (red) zone. If you are at high risk for severe illness, precautions are also recommended if in the medium (yellow) zone. I have announced that once all three counties are in the low (green) zone, DSPs will be permitted to discontinue wearing a face mask if they choose to do so.

No one can predict what the fall and winter will look like with COVID cases, but the DDDS network is prepared to reinstate any mitigation strategy necessary at a moment's notice.

Even when the "great unmasking" happens, there will be instances where face masks will still be necessary. An example would be when someone is COVID positive or quarantining with symptoms and awaiting test results. Of course, anyone who wishes to continue to wear a face mask is permitted to do so as well.

Provider Network Capacity

The DDDS provider network continues to navigate the ongoing DSP workforce challenge. Providers are working to recruit and retain DSPs, but many report that they are not at pre-COVID staffing levels. This limits their ability to welcome service recipients back to their pre-COVID frequency and/or welcome new service recipients to their programs. Please continue to work with your/your loved one's Columbus Community Navigator, Support Coordinator or Family Resource Coordinator for the latest updates and service availability.

Testing and Vaccination Updates

COVID-19 vaccines are now approved for everyone aged six months and older! Across the state, pediatricians' offices have begun vaccinating the youngest Delawareans. Pharmacies and public health clinics continue to offer vaccinations and boosters as well. To find a location, visit <https://coronavirus.delaware.gov/vaccine/where-can-i-get-my-vaccine/>

Testing continues to be one of the best strategies to reduce the spread of the virus. Free at-home test kits remain available through your local libraries. Additionally, Curative and pharmacies continue to offer testing. To find a test site, visit <https://coronavirus.delaware.gov/testing/>

Planning for the Future

As noted last month, across the state we continue to plan for the day when the public health emergency is officially behind us. As a reminder, the Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance (DMMA) will restart eligibility reviews also known as redeterminations. In order to avoid any disruption in services, DMMA is asking all beneficiaries to update their contact information, if it has changed. You can do this by calling DHSS' Change Report Center at 302-571-4900 option 2 or via Delaware ASSIST at <https://assist.dhss.delaware.gov> By ensuring your contact information is accurate, you will be notified of any eligibility documentation that may be necessary to keep your benefits active.

We've certainly learned a lot throughout the pandemic. COVID-19 will likely not be eradicated, and it still sadly takes lives daily. However, through the use of testing strategies, vaccination and boosters, personal protective equipment use and social awareness of risk factors, we have found ways to resume our engagement in the world around us. My sincere hope is that with each passing day, our community experiences get closer to what they were like pre-pandemic. I anticipate little blips along the way, with surges here or there, but remain optimistic that the DDDS service delivery system will continue to persevere and expand opportunities.

Thank you for your patience, understanding and support each month as the public health emergency continues on. We are getting through this together.

Be well,



Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP
Director of Community Services