



September 11, 2020

Dear DDDS Families,

We are almost half-way through September and seemingly settling into a routine of making our way through the unknown. I know how much everyone wants life to get back to pre-COVID status, but unfortunately, we are not there yet. I'm closely monitoring the new cases of COVID-19 in our communities and the numbers are wavering between holding steady and then increasing. Some public health officials are predicting a COVID-19 peak in October, so we need to continue to be prepared for that possibility.

As of this morning, we have had 58 service recipients who live in provider managed settings test positive with COVID-19 since the pandemic started in March. The vast majority of those individuals have fully recovered. We have tragically had seven deaths amongst them and sadly another service recipient who is COVID-19 positive has been transferred to hospice care. This virus is serious and not to be taken lightly, which is why we have instituted controls and protocols to maintain the health and safety of all DDDS service recipients.

For those living in provider managed residential habilitation settings, those sites continue to forbid all but direct support staff who are providing essential services from entering. Family visits can occur outside in an open-air environment, or in the family's own home, provided there are no underlying health issues to contend with and no positive COVID-19 cases in the provider managed setting or in the family home. During a visit, face masks must be worn by family members and social distancing, as much as possible, must be maintained. For those service recipients who have not had a chance for a family visit due to underlying health conditions in either party, I encourage you and the provider to consider virtual/remote visits using Skype, Facetime, Teams, Google, Zoom or your medium of choice. We have had situations where a home was COVID-19 negative and then an exposure occurred, which halted visits with families. I know it is frustrating to have a visit canceled or postponed, but it is to ensure the health and safety of all the service recipients who live in that site and to protect your family as well.

We are still in Stage One of reopening our day services. Many day providers are considering their ability to offer virtual day programming in some capacity for those who cannot attend in-person. This is a complicated process, which may be surprising to some; it involves a lot more than just having a staff person sit in front of a screen. If a provider does ultimately decide that they are able to offer virtual day programming, you will be notified. For those service recipients who previously received community-based training and programming, it is important to note that many of the community partners who previously worked with DDDS providers are not in a position to begin those relationships at present. Community businesses face restrictions for the number of people allowed into a building at a time, requirements for social distancing, and mask wearing as well. I know DDDS day providers are committed to resuming all of the community-based services as soon as it is safe and feasible to do so, but the time is not right now.

As usual, the DDDS Support Coordinators and Family Resource Unit continues to work throughout the pandemic, along with the Columbus Organization's Community Navigators. If you have any questions about services or supports, please do not hesitate to reach out to them for guidance.

In closing, I'd like to invite you to another DDDS Family Virtual Town Hall with me, Jennifer Tozer, DDDS' Manager of Family Engagement, and Shenika Kirby, the Columbus Organization's State Executive Director. We will be addressing the current status of services and will respond to questions as time permits. An ASL interpreter will be present as well. Please join us on Saturday September 19th from 10-10:30am by clicking the link <https://ddds.zoom.us/j/94358992147> or by calling 877 853 5247.

Please continue to follow the rules for social distancing and face mask wearing. Remember to wash or sanitize your hands often. Take advantage of one of the many testing sites available across the state to find out if you have an active case of COVID-19. The numbers of asymptomatic people infected are high. We are all in this together.

Be well,



Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP
Director of Community Services