



## Memorandum

**ECI Document Number:** FY20-ND-011

**To:** ECI Program Directors  
Chief Executive Officers

**From:** Dana McGrath  
Director for Early Childhood Intervention Services

**Date:** May 21, 2020

**Subject:** Reopening ECI Offices and Resuming In-Person Services

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The Health and Human Services Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) program has provided guidance on reopening ECI contractor offices and resuming in-home services. The guidance covers information on safety precautions to take before ECI staff return to offices and family homes, as well as expectations for notifying the ECI state office of these changes. The health and safety needs of children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families, ECI service providers and other office staff are critical in determining when and how to reopen offices and resume home visits.

Each ECI contractor can decide when to reopen offices and when to resume in-person services for those families who have opted to receive telehealth services during the pandemic. This decision should take into account guidance provided by state and local authorities.

If you have any questions about the information in the document, contact your performance specialist.

### **Reopening Offices and Resuming In-Person Services**

Each Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) contractor must make an informed decision — based on the specific needs and circumstances for your region, staff and the families you serve — to determine when and how to safely reopen offices and return to delivering in-person services. The following guidelines are based on information from the Texas Department of State

Health Services (DSHS) [Opening the State of Texas webpage](#), the DSHS [Coronavirus Disease 2019 webpage](#), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [Coronavirus webpage](#) and guidance for Part C programs from the [Early Childhood Technical Assistance \(ECTA\) Center](#). You may use this information to assist with resuming office work and in-person services.

Before reopening the office:

- Assess staff needs for training on universal precautions, using personal protective equipment (PPE), and sanitizing office spaces, equipment and materials taken into homes.
- Assess the need to purchase PPE for staff and/or families, additional disinfecting cleaning supplies for the office, hand sanitizer for staff to carry and other items needed to maintain a safe environment. For information on accessing PPE through a State of Texas Assistance Request, see the information alert sent May 4 titled, "FY20-IA-081- Personal Protective Equipment for Service Providers." You can find recommended methods and supplies for disinfecting a variety of surfaces [here](#).
- Ensure public areas and all surfaces in the office have been cleaned. The CDC website has a [Cleaning and Disinfecting Decision Tool](#) to help determine how to clean and disinfect different office areas. Develop a plan for continued disinfecting and cleaning.
- Develop a plan for using office space in a way that allows for social distancing. This may mean phasing in the return of staff over time or staggering which days and hours during the week each staff person can be in the office.
- Develop a plan for group meetings that will allow staff to maintain a distance of at least six feet from each other. This may mean having multiple meetings with smaller groups of staff in attendance or holding virtual meetings.
- Develop criteria and a plan for returning some or all staff to virtual workspaces and virtual service delivery visits, in case there is an increase in new COVID-19 cases in some parts or all of your service area.

Before resuming in-person visits:

- Work with staff to develop a plan for gradually implementing in-person visits, based on a variety of factors, such as:
  - Number of COVID-19 cases in a particular county or part of your service area.
  - Risk to children and families (for example, a person's medical conditions).
  - Risk to staff.
  - Needs of children and families.
- Develop a plan for prioritizing evaluations and Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) for children whose eligibility determinations and/or IFSPs are overdue.
- Develop a plan for assessing the needs of children and families who suspended services to determine if service needs have changed and if compensatory services are needed.
- Develop a questionnaire for screening all families before staff go into homes. This should include questions on symptoms of and risks for COVID-19. DSHS has developed [guidance for home visits, including what](#) information to gather from clients before making a home visit. Do not allow staff to enter homes where someone has symptoms or has been exposed to COVID-19 in the past 14 days.
- Develop a protocol for staff to follow when they are in the field, including at a minimum:
  - Contacting each family before their visit to screen for symptoms or risks.
  - Washing or disinfecting hands before entering and after leaving each home.
  - Wearing a facemask, if at all possible.
  - Making every effort to maintain a six-foot social distance from the child and family.
  - Disinfecting any items taken into the home.
- Provide information for families about why providers are wearing masks (and other PPE, if applicable) and ask family members over the age of 3 to wear masks if they are willing. Determine how your

program will address services for families who choose not to wear masks. Each case may need to be handled differently based on risk to the provider and the needs of the family. In some cases, a program may determine the risk is low if the provider wears a mask and the family doesn't. In other cases, a program may choose to offer only telehealth services to a family. These situations will require a sensitive and thoughtful discussion with the families involved.

- Provide staff and families with information on how a child's social-emotional needs might be impacted by COVID-19. The ECTA Center has a variety of resources on their [COVID-19 webpage](#). Masks may lead to anxiety, fear and/or fewer opportunities for children to learn to read facial expressions. In the COVID-19 resources document library on the ECI extranet, you can find links to articles about young children and masks in a document titled, "Resources Related to Early Development and Provider Masks."

For the remainder of the pandemic:

- Regularly monitor the COVID-19 webpages created by [Health and Human Services](#) and [DSHS](#) for updates on cases in your area and guidance for service providers and families.
- Screen employees each day for COVID-19 symptoms and risks before they come into the office or go on home visits. Do not allow any staff who have symptoms or who may have been exposed to COVID-19 in the past 14 days to enter the office or make in-person visits. Criteria for allowing staff to return to work can be found in the [Checklist for All Employers](#) PDF from DSHS.
- Provide disposable gloves for staff. Remind them to dispose of the gloves after each visit.
- Place signage around the office to remind staff of social distancing, wearing masks and other practices to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- Have sanitizer available at each entry and exit in the office for staff, families or others to use each time they enter or leave the building.
- Limit visitors to the office.

- Ensure that staff are following protocols for screening families, using PPE and disinfecting their hands, items taken into homes and office areas.
- Limit in-person visits in community settings, including:
  - Libraries
  - Parks, unless tables and play equipment can be disinfected
  - Community centers
  - Churches
  - Stores
  - Restaurants
- Do not resume group services until state and local guidance indicates it is safe to do so.

State office notifications:

Once a decision has been made to reopen an office or resume in-person services, please notify your performance specialist of the following details:

- Expected date the office will reopen.
- Expected date in-person services will resume.
- A summary of the protocols your program will implement to ensure the safety of your staff and the families you serve.

Notify your performance specialist if any staff member who has been seeing families in-person is positive or presumptive positive for COVID-19. If, after you have reopened your office or begun to provide in-person services, you determine you need to close the office or stop in-person services for safety issues, please notify your performance specialist immediately.