MONTHLY CASEWORKER VISITS MODIFIED TO PERMIT VIDEOCONFERENCING

TOPIC
Policy modification to monthly caseworker visits to ensure foster children’s well-being and help stop the spread of COVID-19.

PURPOSE
Provide information on modified monthly caseworker visits via videoconferencing or any similar technology.

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SIGNED
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TERMINOLOGY NOTICE
The terminology used to describe people we serve has changed over time. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the use of "People First" language.
I. Background

As Minnesota experiences the COVID-19 pandemic, we are reviewing opportunities to modify policy and practice to align with measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 through social distancing and quarantine.

Monthly caseworker visits are required with children in foster care. Policy has required face-to-face visits and prohibited using videoconferencing according to the Social Security Act, section 422(b)(17) and Child Welfare Policy Manual (CWPM), §7.3, #8.

To meet the federal requirements, Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.212, subdivision 2, 4a, requires that every child in foster care or co-located with a parent shall be visited face-to-face by a child’s caseworker or another person who has responsibility for managing a child’s placement on a monthly basis, with the majority of visits occurring in child’s residence.

II. Modified policy

On March 18, 2020, a federal reconsideration of policies was issued to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and address the current public health challenges. Governor Tim Walz signed Executive Order 20-12, on March 20, 2020 permitting the commissioner to temporarily waive or modify state statute. In response to the federal authorization and state statutory waiver the commissioner approved a waiver to modify the requirement of monthly face-to-face contacts (260C.212, subd. 4a) by the responsible social services agency (260C.007, subdiv.27a) to permit use of videoconferencing or any similar technology between a child and their foster care caseworker. The waiver of state statute aligns with federal guidance issued.

The monthly caseworker visit requirement remains in place and agencies must continue to comply with the requirement. Videoconferencing offers a safe alternative for everyone conducting monthly caseworker visits during these current extraordinary circumstances. The videoconference must continue to assess the child’s safety, needs and well-being at each visit. We encourage agencies to consider plans of action if a caseworker is not able to reach a child via videoconference, or if the videoconference raises a concern about the child’s safety or well-being.

III. Documenting in SSIS

The Social Service Information System (SSIS) will be deploying a statewide sub-service code that allows for statewide tracking of work and activities related to COVID-19. The statewide code is designed to ensure ease of use for agency staff, flexibility for unanticipated changes, and complete and accurate data collection at the county and tribal agency level as well as across the state. The sub-service code will be available for each BRASS service code.

When a videoconferencing contact is completed with a client in lieu of a face-to-face contact due to work conditions related to COVID-19, please document the contact as follows:
• In the County Sub-Service field, select “87 - COVID19 Related”

• In the Contact method field, select “phone”

IV. Resources

For more information and resources the following are available to help stay informed:

• Centers of Disease Control and Prevention webpage
• Minnesota Department of Human Services webpage (you can sign up for email notifications)
• Minnesota Department of Health webpage
• Office of the Administration for Children & Families Children’s Bureau webpage

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Advisory

This information is available in accessible formats for people with disabilities by calling (651) 431-4670 (voice) by using your preferred relay service. For other information on disability rights and protections, contact the agency’s ADA coordinator.