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Updated August 4, 2020

DCF Order 5

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding COVID-19 for Congregate Care Settings

The Department of Children and Families has received several questions related to operations of congregate care settings during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. We endeavor to answer as many questions as possible as quickly as possible to support you in your service of Wisconsin's children and families.

Can RCCs continue to operate schools?

- Residents of RCCs can continue to attend school at the school operated by the RCC at the agency's discretion. Day students may not continue to attend a school operated by the RCC if there is an order in effect that prevents the operation of schools.

Do congregate care facilities need to continue to meet all health and dental check/exam requirements during the pendency of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency?

- Well visits can be delayed if it is not feasible to meet the required time frames due to the pandemic, see [DCF Emergency Rule EMR2009](#).
- It is still vital to take all steps necessary to address a child's health and dental care needs according to specific recommendations by a child's physician or dentist, but routine appointments can be rescheduled due to the pandemic.

Will the Department waive staffing requirements regarding ratio, training, qualifications and work hours during the pandemic for congregate care facilities that need an exception due to the pandemic if the department determines that the exception will not jeopardize the health, safety or welfare of any child served?

- Yes, an exception must be requested and submitted to DCF for approval.

How do I make quarantine decisions?

- Three entities can order an official quarantine:
 - The local public health department
 - Law enforcement
 - Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS)
- WI DHS has issued guidelines on quarantine here:
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dph/memos/communicable-diseases/2020-08.pdf>

- If a provider were to need to implement an official quarantine or self-quarantine for staff, residents or an entire facility, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is available to assist in any exceptions that may need to be granted to achieve this status.

Can I reallocate staff between programs or specialty areas?

- Yes. All staff need to have background checks outlined in current rule.
- As described in DCF 52.02(2), DCF 57.02(2), and 59.01(4), Wis. Admin Code, exceptions can be granted through the exceptions process for staff qualifications and training. Please complete and submit an exception request to your licensor.
- Please use the Child Welfare Request for Exception form, DCF-F-5023-E, which can be found on the Child Welfare Licensed Facility Forms and Publications page on the DCF website, <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwlicensing/forms>.

Can group homes share staff?

- Group Homes that would like to share staff between agencies and programs would be required to complete the following:
 - Background Information Disclosure form: 57.17(2)(d)
 - Background Check: 57.17(2)(d)
 - A completed application: DCF 57.17(2)(a)
- Exceptions would need to be submitted to DCF for the following:
 - Orientation: 57.16(1) Orientation. Specify when it would be completed.
 - References: 57.15(2)(b)
 - Addresses and phone numbers of references: 57.17(2)(c)
- The Group Home would need to add the staff to PIE within PIE reporting requirements.

What if I need to make exceptions to rules about my physical plant?

- This is permissible through the exception process. Please complete and submit an exception request to your licensor.
- Please use the Child Welfare Request for Exception form, DCF-F-5023-E, which can be found on the Child Welfare Licensed Facility Forms and Publications page on the DCF website, <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwlicensing/forms>.

Can my facility operate an onsite childcare for my employees?

- Information about this can be obtained from the Division of Early Care and Education (DECE).

What do I do when a child is missing from care and returns, as it relates to exposure to COVID-19?

- If a resident has symptoms of COVID-19 or a known exposure, immediately contact your local health department. Your local health department will help assess the situation and provide guidance for further actions.
- Take all steps necessary to address any immediate health care needs of the child through medical attention as appropriate.

Should congregate care facilities continue admissions or enrollment?

- Yes, please continue to accept placements currently consistent with applicable requirements.
- Facilities can utilize screening procedures and should work closely with their local public health department and placing worker if there are concerns about a specific resident being exposed to COVID-19. DCF can assist in this conversation, as needed.

On July 30, 2020, Governor Tony Evers enacted Emergency Order #1, which requires face coverings in Wisconsin in certain situations effective August 1, 2020. How does this mandate apply to child welfare congregate care facilities?

According to [Emergency Order #1](#):

“Every individual, age five and older, in Wisconsin shall wear a face covering if both of the following apply:

- a. The individual is indoors or in an enclosed space, other than at a private residence; and
- b. Another person or persons who are not members of individual’s household or living unit are present in the same room or enclosed space.

Face coverings are strongly recommended in all other settings, including outdoors when it is not possible to maintain physical distancing.”

Emergency Order #1 at p. 2.

“Enclosed space,” “face covering,” and “physical distancing” are defined in the order. *See* Emergency Order #1 at p. 2.

The order provides exceptions when individuals who are otherwise required to wear a face covering need not wear or may remove the face covering including while eating or drinking, when communicating with an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing and communication cannot be achieved through other means, and while sleeping. For a list of all of the exceptions, see Emergency Order #1 at pp. 2-3.

The order also provides a list of individuals who are exempt from the face covering requirement. This list includes individuals who have trouble breathing; individuals who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove their face covering without assistance; and individuals with medical conditions, intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, or other sensory sensitivities that prevent the individual from wearing a face covering. For a list of all of the categories of individuals exempt from the order, see Emergency Order #1 at p. 3.

For the purpose of Emergency Order #1, wings or areas of a congregate care facility where residents live (e.g., private living space or living unit) are considered to be a “private residence.” In those spaces, coverings are not required by the order to be worn by residents. Staff working in congregate care are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings in all areas of the facility, including private living areas, to minimize exposure risk to the children and youth in placement, as well as to co-workers.

Wings or areas of a congregate facility that are not private living areas (including but not limited to common areas, a residential school, a visiting area, etc.) are not considered to be a “private residence” under the order. In those spaces, coverings are required by the order to be worn by residents, staff, and any other individual who enters those areas.

Each congregate facility is encouraged to determine which areas of the facility are designated as a “private residence” and which areas are designated as common areas, consistent with the order, and to use signage to mark these areas so that residents, staff, and any other individual who enters the facility is aware of where face coverings must be worn.

Residents and staff are encouraged to wear face coverings and maintain physical distancing from each other during their stay in a congregate care facility as much as possible.

[Face Covering FAQs](#) provides additional information regarding the state’s mandate for face coverings.

It is important to note that the Governor’s order sets a minimum bar. If the county, town or city in which your facility is located has a local order concerning face coverings or masks, the stricter of the two orders must be followed. Individual facilities may also implement measures that are more restrictive than Emergency Order #1 and/or local orders.