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TO: DDD PROVIDER NETWORK
FROM: Division of Developmental Disabilities
RE: Response to COVID-19
DATE: 3/13/20

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Guidance for Alabama Community Providers of Services for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

Today Alabama Department Public Health (ADPH) announced two confirmed cases of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The virus may evolve rapidly and may seem overwhelming to providers, families, and the individuals with developmental disabilities we serve. The next several weeks ahead will certainly be a challenge for all of us. With so many unknowns about the virus and the effect it is having in the world, it is understandable that our provider community is concerned.

The highest priority of the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) is the health, safety and well-being of individuals with disabilities, families, staff, and all Alabamians. The Commissioner of ADMH is in close communication with the ADPH and the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) is communicating with the Alabama Medicaid Agency (AMA). Furthermore, we are also monitoring Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) communications as well as those made through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). As a Community Provider on the front-line, you can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by adhering to the basic standards and best practices outlined herein as you prepare for and respond to COVID-19.

The DDD expects that every Community Provider is implementing its Emergency Plan. If your agency has created a specific COVID-19 emergency plan, please submit the COVID-19 plan to your Regional Office so they are aware.

The following procedures are recommended:

- Contact your local Department of Public Health to let them know you have vulnerable, at risk population
- Discontinue visitation
- Discontinue community engagement activities
- Practice social distancing
- Practice good hygiene
- Implement continuous infection control procedures
- Begin screening of staff (see below)

- Review and be familiar with underlying medical conditions that may increase the risk of serious COVID-19 for individuals of any age (See attached “Implementation of Mitigation Strategies for Communities with Local COVID-19 Transmission”)
- Assess the health of individuals served on a regular basis and if fever is indicated, contact the individual’s physician for further evaluation and instructions

Screening procedures of staff entering settings should include:

- Check temperature and ask the following questions:
 - Have you been sick?
 - Have you had a fever or cough recently?
 - Have you traveled outside the country recently?
 - Have you been around individuals that have displayed symptoms of fever or cough and traveled outside of the country?
- If the screening indicates the probability of infection (fever and yes to any of the screening questions), staff should not return to the setting for 14 days
- Residential settings should have emergency procedures for quarantining in place
- For day programs, determine if there is a need to close the program for a period of time
- As the Alabama Department of Public Health stands up testing locations, individuals and staff can be tested. Further communication will be shared early next week

Critical Supplies, Food, Medication, Medical Supplies, PPE

Every Community Provider, as appropriate for its operation, will need to evaluate their emergency stock of critical supplies.

- Check for an adequate supply of food, water, supplements and thickening agents
- Check that refills are available on prescription medications
- Evaluate levels of medical equipment and supplies
- Evaluate levels of personal protective equipment (PPE)

The DDD recommends that all families and providers have a two-week supply of food and water available in case of emergency, including quarantine. Inventory items like canned goods and other shelf stable foods and determine whether more should be purchased. Based on the needs of the individual(s), ensure there is an adequate supply of supplements (Ensure, vitamins, etc.) and food thickening agents (if required).

If prescription medication refills are needed, contact the individual’s doctor to request. Check items that may have expiration dates. Identify alternate vendors for obtaining prescription and over-the-counter medications if relationships with established vendors become strained or disrupted. **Contact the individual with developmental disabilities’ physician if you have difficulty obtaining refills.**

Items like incontinence briefs, disinfectant, soap, clean towels/paper towels and alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60% or higher) will also need to be available. Know what you have on hand and have a plan to obtain more when needed. Pay special attention to items that may be reaching the end of their shelf life. Do not forget to ensure a working thermometer is readily available. Contact your current supply vendors to ensure inventory availability.

PPE are items like gloves, gowns and face masks. The need for these items may depend on the location of the Community Provider and population served. Inventory existing PPE to ascertain

current supply levels and to ensure replacement of items reaching end-of-life. Contact vendors to ensure their inventory is available. To avoid overutilization of PPE and potential impact to your supply, follow CDC guidelines about when to use PPE. Safeguarding PPE from theft may need to be considered.

CMS is instructing state and federal surveyors not to cite agencies for not providing certain supplies, such as PPE, if they are having difficulty obtaining these supplies for reasons outside their control. However, Community Providers are still expected to take all reasonable actions to mitigate shortages.

Emergency Funding

The DDD recommends that providers keep itemized receipts, detailed records or logs of any purchases arising from COVID-19 preparedness or response to illness, and staffing changes needed to accommodate the COVID-19 response.

The DDD recommends that providers keep itemized receipts and detailed records of any purchases or staffing changes needed to accommodate COVID-19 preparedness and response, as reimbursement may be available in the future.

The DDD will notify provider of any changes in requirements for delivery of services as they occur and once the DDD receives guidance from Alabama Medicaid Agency.

The President has issued an emergency declaration that will assist with the cost of expenses related to the emergency.

Day Service & Congregate Settings

Community Providers who offer day services should follow ADPH and CDC recommendations for social distancing, infection control, visitor limitations, and consider if their agency needs to close temporarily. The DDD will relax community outing requirements for Community Providers while the CDC and CMS recommend at-risk individuals avoid crowds as much as possible.

The DDD expects providers to follow emergency closure protocols for announcing closures, including standard notification of the Director of their DDD Regional Office. The DDD tracks and uses this information to provide necessary support and guidance to our Community Provider network.

Visitor Restrictions for all Settings

Each agency should develop a policy on visitors with the following CDC recommendations in mind:

- Send letters or emails to families advising them to consider postponing or using alternative methods for visitation (i.e. video conferencing) during the next several months
- Post signs at the entrances to the setting instructing visitors to not enter if they have fever or symptoms of a respiratory infection. Consider having visitors sign visitor logs in case contact tracing becomes necessary
- Ask all visitors about fever or symptoms of respiratory infection. Restrict anyone with:
 - Fever or symptoms of respiratory infection (e.g., cough, sore throat, or shortness of breath)
 - International travel within the last 14 days to affected countries. Information on high-risk countries is available on the [CDC's COVID-19 travel website](#)
 - Contact with an individual with COVID-19

- Resides in a community where community-based spread of COVID-19 is occurring
- When allowed, visitors should be encouraged to frequently perform hand hygiene and limit their movement and interactions with others in the setting (e.g., confine themselves to the resident's room)
- When visitor restrictions are implemented, the setting should facilitate remote communication between the resident and visitors (e.g., video-call applications on cell phones or tablets), and have policies addressing when and how visitors might still be allowed to enter the setting (e.g., end of life situations)
- Visitors may include vendors, family, emergency family visits, maintenance employees, state staff, anyone not residing or employed in the setting

Closures

If a person's usual day program is closed, then residential providers should activate their emergency plan, including appropriate staffing ratios, as they would during inclement weather events. Individuals may stay at home with their provider or family member(s). The DDD recommends that providers keep records of staffing changes needed to accommodate COVID-19 preparedness and response, as reimbursement may be available in the future.

If a residential services provider is required to temporarily relocate due to an emergency, they must notify the Regional Director for that region of all the individuals that are being relocated, the address of the new site, and provide a contact number for the new site. While the choice and opinion of individuals with developmental disabilities should always be considered, the DDD expects Community Providers to prioritize the health and safety of the individuals they serve.

Provider Operations and Procedures

Maintain open communication with individuals and families/guardians. Communicate with individuals and families/guardians about preparedness steps your agency takes, including any changes to the daily activities of individuals with developmental disabilities

Develop staffing and programming plans, in the event that federal and state authorities direct individuals not to congregate in social settings like day programs. Providers must create a back-up staffing plan that can support individuals in other settings

If a community has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps. The best advice if a confirmed case of COVID-19 happens in your community or a DDD community-based setting is to stay home as much as possible to reduce the risk of being exposed. Community spread is how the common cold and flu are transmitted. Depending on the severity, local health department officials may recommend additional actions to help reduce the risk of being exposed to COVID-19 if an outbreak happens in your community. These actions can slow the spread and reduce the impact of disease. It is important to follow directions from local health department officials. Individuals may be asked to do one or more of the following:

- Monitor for cold-like symptoms that may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure:
 - Fever
 - Cough
 - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath

- Quarantine at home which means to separate and restrict the movement of those who are well, but who may have been exposed to disease but do not show symptoms to help stop the spread of disease
- Isolation at home, which means to separate those who are sick from those who are healthy to help stop the spread of disease

If an individual with disabilities is asked to do any of the above, the individual's health care practitioner and/or local health department will provide information about how to proceed. These individuals may also be asked a lot of questions about their recent travel, activity and interaction with others outside their home. This is a normal part of contact tracing, which health care practitioners and scientists use to help determine the risk of COVID-19 exposure in communities.

Currently, people at risk for contracting COVID-19:

- Recently traveled to geographic areas of concern identified on the [CDC's COVID-19 travel website](#)
- Have close, personal contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19
- Care for people with COVID-19
- Live in a community with community-based spread of COVID-9

If an individual with developmental disabilities is an older adult or has one or more chronic health conditions, they can take action to reduce their risk of exposure to COVID-19:

- Practice social distancing and take everyday precautions to keep space between themselves and others
- When out in public, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash hands often with soap and water or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol content
- Avoid crowds as much as possible

A COVID-19 information bulletin developed by and people with disabilities is included with this communication and will be available on the ADMH website to help educate individuals supported about COVID-19, how to help prevent the spread of the disease and what may happen if they work.

Infection Control

The DDD recommends that all Community Providers re-educate all staff on infection control cleaning procedures. This re-education should occur immediately for each person who engages, or may engage, in cleaning. In settings where staff work on different shifts and/or have staggered days off, re-education should occur on each shift until all staff are trained.

All staff should receive training on the selection, use, removal and disposal of personal protective equipment (PPE). Proper removal and disposal of PPE is critical for preventing infection. There are a variety of training resources available:

- CDC's COVID-19 PPE FAQ with a variety of links and resources:
 - www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/respirator-use-faq.html
- CDC training posters:
 - www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/pdfs/PPE-Sequence-508.pdf

- The CDC video trainings in response to other infection control needs:
 - www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/hcp/ppe-training/comprehensive-ppe-training.html

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) has published several guidance documents on infection control and COVID-19. Community Providers should review these documents and use them to identify enhancements in your existing infection control policies and emergency preparedness plans for epidemics and pandemics. Although these documents are written for healthcare providers, many of the recommendations are best practices for all providers responsible for the long-term health and safety of individuals receiving residential and setting- based services.

- CDC Hospital Preparedness Assessment Tool:
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hcp-hospital-checklist.html>
- CDC Long-Term Care and other Residential Facilities Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist:
 - www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/pdf/longtermcare.pdf

Identification, Testing, & Quarantine of Suspected Cases

Identification

If a person with developmental disabilities exhibits the symptoms of COVID-19 and has any of the following exposures, they should seek medical attention right away.

- Recent travel to any geographic area of concern identified on the [CDC's COVID-19 travel website](#)
- Contact with someone with COVID-19
- Lives in a community with community-based spread of COVID-9

If the individual is also an older adult or has underlying medical conditions, they should contact their healthcare provider early, even if their illness is mild.

Call ahead before bringing the individual to a doctor's office or emergency room, so they can prepare and protect others in the area. If possible, have the individual wear a face mask. Tell the medical professionals about any recent travel and any close contacts, including people in the household.

Testing

The person's doctor will determine whether or not the individual needs to be tested for COVID-19 based on their symptoms, potential exposure, and other clinical factors. Not all people who have the symptoms of COVID-19 will be tested.

COVID-19 diagnostic tests may include nose and mouth swabs, sputum samples, and/or other samples as needed. The clinician will determine which, if any tests are needed. Individuals should follow all recommendations from the medical professionals, including returning for additional or follow-up examinations.

Suspected Cases

If the person has a suspected or diagnosed case of COVID-19, they should notify their local health department, their case manager, and their DDD Regional Office immediately. People who have been exposed to COVID-19 may be placed under quarantine at their home by a health care professional or local health department official. This is to prevent them from transmitting the disease to others. The quarantine may be lifted, and the person allowed to leave the home only

after consultation with their health care provider.

The person's health care provider or local health department will provide information about how to proceed. You may also be asked a lot of questions about your recent travel, activity and interaction with others outside of the home. This is a normal part of contact tracing, which health care practitioners and scientists use to help determine the risk of COVID-19 exposure in communities.

Quarantines are to protect the health of the general public, which outweighs the individual's right to go out in public. The provider should explain to the person with developmental disabilities why they were quarantined and the precautions taken to prevent new infections, in order to follow quarantine guidance provided by health care professionals. The Community Provider should notify their local health officer if an individual is not following quarantine orders.

Group or shared homes serving a quarantined person should follow infection control measures recommended for homes and residential communities, including:

- Separate the quarantined individual by using separate bed and bathrooms, when possible
- Call and notify health care professionals before going to appointments to notify them that the person with developmental disabilities has or is currently being evaluated for COVID-19
- Ask the quarantined person to wear a face mask while they are in the same room as others, or have others wear a facemask while in the same room as the quarantined person
- Avoid sharing household items like dishes, glasses, utensils, towels, and bedding
- Clean hard surfaces and high touch points in the home with a diluted bleach solution or EPA-approved household disinfectant at least once a day
 - To make a diluted bleach solution add ¼ cup of bleach to 1 gallon of water
- Wear disposable gloves while handling soiled laundry or bedding from the quarantined individual. Wash and dry laundry with the warmest temperature recommended on the item's label
- Limit or restrict visitors who do not need to be in the home

If the person's caregiver is quarantined due to COVID-19, the person may request emergency support from their provider agency. If the individual has self-directed services, they may work with their Support Broker to arrange for alternative staff.

Contact your local health department for more information on quarantine procedures, and review the CDC's guide to infection prevention in the home: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>

NOTE: If an individual with developmental disabilities is diagnosed with COVID-19, the DDD wants to be notified immediately upon confirmation of this diagnosis.

Meetings, Group Gatherings, Visits and Monitoring

The DDD recommends that Community Providers practice social distancing. Social distancing practices include:

- Ensure sure that shared spaces in the home have good airflow (e.g., an air conditioner or an opened window, weather permitting)
- Consider interacting outdoors if appropriate
- Practice good hand hygiene and cough etiquette

- When contact with an ill person cannot be avoided, follow standard infection prevention practices as recommended by your employer

For more information on CDC recommendations for people who have close contact in a home setting, please review: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>

Be prepared:

- Update and/review your agency's emergency plan
- Establish relationships with key health care and local health department partners in your community
- Create an agency specific emergency list
- Conduct an inventory of available Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Train your staff on proper use of PPE

Communicate with your staff and individuals with developmental disabilities about COVID- 19

- Report any Support staff shortages to your DDD Regional Office
- COVID-19 Information By and For People with Disabilities (See attached)

Attached you will find examples of Front-line Emergency Response Plans and other flyers that may be of benefit. We appreciate those who sent resources. Additional updates are forthcoming.

VALUABLE RESOURCES

State Guidance

- Medicaid encourages all recipients and providers to subscribe to Medicaid's texting service to receive immediate text messages regarding to the COVID-19.
 - Opt-In Instructions
If you are a provider: Click the following link to view instructions
https://medicaid.alabama.gov/documents/9.0_Resources/9.10_Texting_Service/9.10_Providers_Alabama_Medicaid's_Texting_Service_instructions.pdf
 - Please encourage recipients to sign up also: Click the following link to view instructions
https://medicaid.alabama.gov/documents/9.0_Resources/9.10_Texting_Service/9.10_Recipients_Alabama_Medicaid's_Texting_Service_instructions.pdf
- For the latest on COVID-19 from Alabama health officials visit
<http://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/infectiousdiseases/2019-coronavirus.html>
- Regularly monitor COVID-19 on the ADPH website: <http://alabamapublichealth.gov/>
- [Alabama EMA](#) may also be a resource for local emergency alerts
- Watch CDC's video demonstrating good hand hygiene:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d914EnpU4Fo&feature=youtu.Tbe>

The following are additional resources that the DDD recommends providers, families, and individuals with developmental disabilities review for further information and guidance:

CMS Guidance

- Regularly monitor the situation on CDC's COVID-19 webpage:
www.cdc.gov/COVID19
- [CMS Current Emergencies](#)
- [Guidance for Home Health Agencies and Providers about COVID-19](#)
- [Information for Healthcare Facilities Concerning 2019 Novel Coronavirus Illness \(2019-nCoV\)](#)
- [Guidance for Infection Control and Prevention of COVID-19 in Nursing Homes](#)
- [FAQ on Guidance to State Survey Agencies Suspending Non-Emergency Survey Inspections](#)
- [Actions to Address Spread of Coronavirus Press Release](#)

CDC Guidance

- Subscribe to the CDC's COVID-19 newsletter:
<https://tools.cdc.gov/campaignproxyservice/subscriptions.aspx>
- [About Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [FAQs for State Medicaid and CHIP Agencies](#)
- [People at Risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19](#)
- [How To Clean and Disinfect Schools To Help Slow the Spread of Flu](#)
- [Strategies for Optimizing the Supply of N95 Respirators](#)
- [Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in Homes and Residential Communities](#)
- [Interim Additional Guidance for Infection Prevention and Control for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19 in Nursing Homes](#)

Other National Guidance

- [Administration for Community Living: COVID-19 Information Webpage](#)
- [COVID-19 Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel](#)
- [Department of Labor: Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)