

**Question: There was a lot of information presented during the town hall meeting. Is there a recording available?**

**Answer:** A recording of the town hall is available using the same link you used to access the live feed: <https://rb.gy/l6wmis>. This link will also work if you were unable to attend the live town hall at the scheduled time.

**Question: How are court proceedings being impacted? Will our next scheduled hearing still occur? Are virtual hearings being conducted?**

**Answer:** Many courts have or will be changing their procedures regarding hearings and how they are currently managing their dockets. Communications regarding court changes can be found at <https://courts.michigan.gov/News-Events/Pages/COVID-19.aspx>.

The Michigan Supreme Court Administrative Order 2020-2 deemed Permanency Planning Hearings and 24-hour Preliminary and Emergency Removal Hearings following a child being taken into protective custody as essential functions of the court during this timeframe and as such, many courts are continuing to hold these hearings virtually. Local courts are determining which additional hearings can be held virtually using videoconferencing or telephone participation. For information on how your hearings may be affected, contact your caseworker, your attorney, or the court. You should stay in close touch with your attorney throughout this process and let them know about your needs.

**Question: Can children still return home during the Stay Home Stay Safe order?**

**Answer:** Yes, MDHHS is doing everything possible to reunify children with their parents as soon as possible during this time. You should be in touch with your attorney about your progress and be sure they know what you want and what support you need.

**Question: I am not able to participate in the services on my treatment plan because the service providers are closed due to the Stay Home Stay Safe order. How will this affect my case?**

**Answer:** Generally speaking, parents who were participating in services prior to the Stay Home Stay Safe order would not be considered non-compliant with their treatment plan if they are unable to participate in services that have been postponed or disrupted due to the pandemic. Your caseworker is the best person to ask for information about requirements on your specific treatment plan and how they will be reporting to court about compliance prior to, during, and after the Stay Home Stay Safe order. You should also contact your service providers individually to see if they are offering alternate means of service provision during this time. Lastly, contact your attorney to keep them informed of your progress and discuss the steps that can be taken to have your children returned. Be sure to document all the steps you are taking to stay in contact with your children and participate in services.

**Question: I feel like I don't know what is going on with my case right now. Will Family Team Meetings (FTMs) continue to be held during the pandemic? Will there be mandatory FTMs to "catch up" team members after the Stay Home order is lifted?**

**Answer:** To the extent possible, virtual FTMs should be occurring. FTMs will be important after the Stay Home Stay Safe order is lifted to address important case plans and decisions. As always, you should direct any questions about your child and your case to your caseworker and/or their supervisor, and your attorney.

**Question: When will I be able to start having face-to-face visits with my children again?**

**Answer:** MDHHS will resume in person visits as soon as possible. On or about May 1<sup>st</sup>, we will update parents about whether visits can resume. This decision will depend on the status of the Governor's Stay Safe Stay Home Executive Order.

**Question: I have heard that young children should not use screens, because it might be bad for their eyes or brain development. Is video visitation harmful to young children?**

**Answer:** While there is no evidence to suggest that screen use is bad for young children's eyes, in general, it is correct that too much screen time is not good for children. It is also a good practice to avoid bright screens close to bedtime, as it can disrupt sleep for some children.

However, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has said that video contact with loved ones, especially when face-to-face contact isn't possible, is not harmful to children. The difference is the interaction that happens between a child and their parent, sibling, or loved one during the video conference. That interaction supports brain development in ways that watching cartoons or playing games on a device do not.

**Question: My video visits are shorter than my in-person visits were before the Stay Home Stay Safe order. How can I get more video visit time with my child(ren)?**

**Answer:** MDHHS supports frequent contact between parents and their children, especially during Stay Home Stay Safe. Specific questions about your visitation schedule should be directed to your caseworker. In general, especially for young children (ages 0-5), best practices suggest that video visitation be short but frequent. Young children are typically not able to focus on video visitation for more than 20 minutes at a time, but until in-person visits can resume, it may be possible to arrange for several short video visits throughout the week in place of the longer in-person visits you were having.

**Question: How are face-to-face contacts between my child and his/her foster care caseworker being handled during the Stay Home Stay Safe order?**

**Answer:** Foster care caseworkers are maintaining frequent contact with children and their caregivers by phone or video options like FaceTime and Skype. Caseworkers are not visiting children in person unless there is an immediate child health or safety concern.

**Question: I sometimes send "snail mail" to the office for my children, and their caseworker gives it to them. Can I get the address of my child's placement so that I can send things directly to them, since my caseworker is not usually in the office and it would allow my child to receive cards and letters sooner?**

**Answer:** You may be able to send letters or cards directly to your child's placement. You should contact your caseworker to discuss further.

**Question: What resources are available for parents who don't have a phone or home Wi-Fi so that they can talk to or have video visits with their children?**

**Answer:** There are a few options for free or low-cost telephone services. The Lifeline Assistance program, sometimes referred to as "Obama phones," provides free or discounted cell phones to families with limited income. Generally, if you qualify for food assistance, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Section 8, or similar tribal assistance programs, or your income is less than 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, you will qualify for Lifeline Assistance. Different cellular providers have

different plans and service different geographic areas. You can click [here](#) to see if you qualify, or you can contact your caseworker to assist you.

If you are not able to get a phone through the Lifeline program, contact your caseworker to ask about whether MDHHS is able to assist you in getting one to use for contact with your child until in-person visits can resume.

Many internet providers are offering free internet access to new customers and/or low-income households. Families should contact the internet service providers available in their area to inquire about available services.

**Question: My child is really struggling right now with not being able to see me in person. Is there any way we can be granted an exception to see each other face to face? What else can I do to make the lack of in-person visits easier on my child?**

**Answer:** Many children in foster care may be struggling due to lack of in person contact with their parents and siblings. Generally, caregivers have been encouraged to allow frequent and regular contact between you and your children through phone calls, videoconferencing options such as Skype, FaceTime, or Zoom, text messages, and emails.

Exceptions to the suspension of face to face parenting time/sibling visits may be considered if there is risk of severe psychological harm to the child. If you believe an exception should be considered for your child(ren), contact the child's caseworker to discuss whether an exception request should be submitted to MDHHS leadership.

**Question: Are there any suggestions for how to get the most out of video visitation, especially with young children?**

**Answer:** With young children ages 0-5, shorter, more frequent video chats of 15-20 minutes multiple times each week are usually more beneficial than longer, less frequent visits. While it may take some getting used to, you can do many of the things with your young child during a video visit that you were doing during in person visits. Babies still love simple games like "peek-a-boo," and you can still sing songs and read books like you were probably doing during in person visits. Toddlers love to point out what they are doing and the things around them, so it can be helpful for the foster parent or relative caregiver to make sure some of their toys are within reach and to "translate" if your baby or toddler is pointing to something you cannot see.

Other resources for making the most out of video visitation include:

- The Youth Law Center's Quality Parenting Initiative webinar on [Using Media Effectively with Young Children and Virtual Visitation](#), which has even more tips for making the most of video visits with very young children from 6 months through 5 years of age.
- NCCD's [Successful Video Visits with Young Children](#).
- [Virtual Parent Time](#) [handout](#).

**Question: I've heard that sometimes in-home services are required for children to be able to return home. Are those in-home services still available?**

**Answer:** In-home services provided by Family Reunification Program, Families First of Michigan, and Families Together Building Solutions are considered essential services and are still available during the Stay Home Stay Safe order.

**Question: Can WIC and Bridge cards be used for grocery delivery or pick up?**

**Answer:** Many stores, including Walmart, Kroger, and Meijer, are expanding their payment options for online ordering to allow for payment using your Bridge Card for pick up or delivery of qualifying items. If you're unsure whether the store you use offers this as an option, you should contact the store directly. At this time, WIC funds can only be used in the store.

**Question: How can I explain current events to my children and support them during this difficult time?**

**Answer:** Parents should ensure they are sharing accurate information about the coronavirus and COVID-19 with their children. With the variety of information sources available, some children and youth, especially those with access to social media, may see or hear inaccurate information. Families should check reliable sources, like the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the [World Health Organization](#), and [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#) for fact-based information.

The amount of information a child can understand about the coronavirus will depend on the child's age and development. In general, follow your child's lead; some children may want to spend time talking, while others may not seem interested or have a lot of questions. *Kids Health from Nemours* offers some general guidelines on [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): How to Talk to Your Child](#).

As always, if you have concerns about the mental health and well-being of your child, you should contact their therapist or ask your caseworker about a referral for mental health services.

**Question: I have a teenager, so while they are really good at using FaceTime, they are having a really hard time not seeing their family and friends in person. What suggestions do you have for helping my teenager right now?**

**Answer:** Older youth may particularly struggle with being isolated from their friends and family. Older youth and young adults oftentimes feel a sense of invincibility and may have difficulty understanding the importance of adhering to social distancing guidelines. *The Child Mind Institute* has helpful tips for [Supporting Teenagers and Young Adults During the Coronavirus Crisis](#).

UNICEF has tips for [How Teenagers Can Protect Their Mental Health During Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

**Question: What is MDHHS doing to minimize the trauma my child is experiencing due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic, including changes in our visitation plan, the closure of their schools, and the disruption of their everyday routines.**

**Answer:** Your child's caseworker should maintain regular contact with your child's foster parent or relative caregiver, to assess your child's mental and physical health and well-being. Depending on the child's age and developmental capacity, the caseworker will also engage with the child to have these discussions. Most children who were already involved in mental health services have been able to continue those services using telehealth options, and your caseworker can still refer your child for mental health services.

In addition, a "warm line" for mental health needs was recently launched to connect individuals with certified peer support specialists who have experience with behavioral health concerns, trauma, or personal crises. It operates 7 days/week, 10 am – 2 am, at 1-888-733-7753.

**Question: My children and I still reside in the same community. What should I do if we happen to see each other out on a walk?**

**Answer:** Generally speaking and as a regular practice, you should abide by social distancing by staying 6 feet apart from individuals who reside in other households.

**Question: Can we have our case transferred to another state?**

**Answer:** Transfer of jurisdiction is facilitated through the courts. Transfer of jurisdiction would depend on the unique circumstances of your case and is unlikely to occur if you and your children reside in Michigan. If you are living outside of Michigan and believe your case should be transferred to the state where you reside, you should reach out to your caseworker and attorney.

**Question: What other resources are available to support youth and families during the coronavirus outbreak?**

**Answer:** In addition to the resources referenced above, families may want to explore the resources listed below.

MDHHS has posted several COVID-19 resources on the [MDHHS Foster Care Forms and Publications](#) public website, including [COVID-19 Resources and Tips for Parents and Caregivers](#), letters for parents and foster parents and guidance issued to child welfare staff.

[Resources to Support Youth and Families During the Coronavirus COVID-19 Outbreak](#) developed by *Youth.gov* has a list of information and resources regarding childcare, education, employment/unemployment insurance, finances, food and nutrition, and mental health.

The *National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)* has published a [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease 2019](#).

*Common Sense Media* has a list of [Resources for Families During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#), including educational resources and homework help, family-friendly entertainment resources, and tips for helping kids and parents understand COVID-19 news coverage.