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Executive Office of Health & Human Services  
Department of Developmental Services  
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*To: DDS Individuals and Families*  
*From: Commissioner Jane F. Ryder*  
*Date: 5/22/2020*  
*Subject: Coronavirus Update for Individuals and Families*

Dear DDS Community:

Much has happened in the weeks since my last message. I'd like to provide an update on the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) response to COVID-19 as of Friday, May 22.

As experts predicted, Massachusetts saw a surge of positive cases of COVID-19. We have experienced the surge across our programs and we have mourned the loss of those in our community — individuals we serve, coworkers, colleagues, friends, and family.

Now, after more than two months of staying home and tough protective measures, such as restricting all visitation, we are beginning to flatten the curve. The number of new positive cases identified each day are starting to decrease as we continue to socially distance and increase our access and efforts around testing. By engaging in distancing and protective measures, together we have saved lives. We must continue to remain vigilant as we move toward a new normal.

I have been so impressed with your resourcefulness and resilience in this uncertain time. I have heard wonderful stories of families finding new ways to connect remotely and staff going above and beyond during this public health crisis. We have seen big and small acts of creativity, commitment, and compassion in our community every day.

As Massachusetts and the nation look toward a slow and cautious reopening, our priority at DDS is the health and safety of the individuals we serve and our staff. We will continue to focus on three key factors to keep people safe: infectious disease precautions, personal protective equipment (PPE), and testing.

I know there is anxiety and many questions around re-opening. Visitation, day and employment programs, and transportation are at the front of our minds. As we look to restart

operations, we are committed to making this process as smooth and safe as possible. This means making decisions based on data and following the latest advice from public health experts. While we don't have all the answers today, we look forward to hearing your ideas and feedback.

DDS is actively working with public health experts on safe visitation protocols that will keep you, your loved one, and their caregivers safe. We will announce any updates to the current visitation protocol as soon as we are able.

Additionally, we are working with our provider community to plan the path forward for day programs and transportation services. We will continue to communicate with you as plans develop.

In the meantime, we want to hear your ideas. Let us know the biggest ways in which all this is impacting you and what you'd like to see from us. As we work through the rest of this pandemic — as always — please feel free to get in touch and give us feedback [through our website](#) or share ideas with your Service Coordinator.

Your Area Office is here to support you and will remain in contact with you to ensure your loved one is receiving services and both your needs are addressed.

We will update [the DDS website](#) and social media as information becomes available.

Please see below for further updates about the DDS response to COVID-19.

Thank you,

Jane F. Ryder  
Commissioner  
[Department of Developmental Services](#)

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### **Family Support**

DDS-funded [Family Support Centers](#) continue to provide assistance and support to families through this crisis and are here for emergency support and information about local resources. Please contact your DDS Area Office if you need help connecting with your local Family Support Center.

### **Visitation**

To keep your loved ones and their caregivers safe and healthy, in-person visitation to group homes and residential facilities remains prohibited, except for certain compassionate care situations, such as end-of-life. DDS is actively working with public health experts on safe visitation protocols to help you see your loved ones in a way that keeps you, your loved ones, and their caregivers safe. We will announce any updates to the current visitation protocol as soon as we are able.

### **Guidance for Residential Programs and Facilities**

DDS has been focused on providing clear guidance to support residential programs and facilities in order to best care for the individuals we serve. Beyond the [guidance document for residential programs](#) (last updated April 13), DDS has also organized for infectious disease consultation services to be available. The staff at the Hogan Regional Center and Wrentham Developmental Center, our state-operated group homes, and provider-operated group homes continue to consult with infectious disease specialists to provide care and ensure operational protocols meet Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) guidelines and standards.

### **Access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

We are working in collaboration with DPH and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to continue to procure and provide access to PPE and cleaning supplies, and DDS programs have an adequate supply to meet needs. DDS state-operated homes and facilities submit lists of their current supplies and their needs semiweekly, while DDS providers may request emergency PPE through MEMA.

### **Testing**

We are continuing to provide testing to residents and staff in DDS state-operated or provider-operated residential programs through a partnership with Fallon Ambulance and MassHealth. As of May 20, Fallon has visited over 1,300 DDS sites and tested over 16,000 individuals and staff. DDS and its provider agencies have also organized over 30 testing pop-ups across the state to provide greater access to testing for those who work most closely and do the most for the individuals we serve. So far, we have tested over 4,500 staff at these pop-up sites. DDS has also created [social stories and checklists](#) (both visual and audio resources available on our website) to help prepare individuals for swab testing or a mobile testing visit.

### **DDS Offices**

Regional and Area Offices remain closed to the public for visitation. Please contact your Area Office by phone or email regarding services and supports, and our staff will return your message.

### **Health**

If you or anyone in your family has symptoms of illness (fever, cough, or difficulty breathing) or potential exposure to the COVID-19 virus, please take these steps:

- Check your symptoms online: [buoy.com/mass](https://www.buoy.com/mass).
- Contact your primary care physician and follow their guidance.
- Contact the Massachusetts DPH epidemiology line: [\(617\) 983-6800](tel:6179836800).

For the latest information on COVID-19, please call 2-1-1 or visit: [mass.gov/covid19](https://www.mass.gov/covid19)

### **Disabled Persons Protection Committee (DPPC)**

To report suspicion of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse or neglect of a person with a disability, contact the DPPC 24-hour hotline:

- [1-800-426-9009](tel:1-800-426-9009)
- [1-888-822-0350](tel:1-888-822-0350) (TTY)

### **Supportive Technology Stories**

DDS would like to feature stories of success with supportive technology so others may see the uses and benefits of these tools. If you've had success using supportive tech, such as tablets, voice assistants, telemedicine, or remote services, let us know. Get in touch on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) @DDSmass to share your story.