

# Temporary COVID Aware Family Time Plan

Given increasing **COVID-19 disease activity** across the state, reducing the opportunity to transmit the virus in Family Time visits needs to be addressed in every case. At the same time, it is vitally important for children to remain connected with their parents and siblings during the pandemic, which has serious emotional and cognitive consequences for children and youth. On Dec. 4, 2020, the federal **Children's Bureau** emphasized the need for courts and agencies to ensure that ongoing Family Time is provided.

## Step 1: Create an agreed Temporary COVID Aware Family Time Plan.

To reduce the opportunity for viral transmission, parties should review the current Family Time Plan, identify changes to reduce transmission and agree on a Temporary COVID Aware Family Time Plan. DCYF caseworkers should engage caregivers and visit providers in this process. Some Family Time plans are already low-risk and will not need to be altered. If a family is close to reunification, consider ways to expedite return home.

Temporary COVID Aware Family Time Plans should be based on measures that have been scientifically determined to reduce transmission risk, such as:

- All participants must complete the pre-screening questions AND adhere at all times to the safety protocols, including mandatory masking for everyone (over the age of 2 years) present at a Family Time visit.
- Change where visits happen:
  - Holding in-person Family Time visits outside whenever possible. Longer visits can be held outside with strict adherence to face coverings and 6+ feet of physical distancing between the visitation provider and the parent/child(ren).
  - If outside visits are not possible, hold Family Time in a suitable indoor location, defined as a non-busy, well-ventilated area with sufficient room to allow for social distancing between the visitation provider and the parent/child(ren).
    - Shorten indoor visits to reduce the time everyone spends in close contact. The CDC defines close contact as being within 6 feet of someone for 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.



- Reduce the number of contacts children have with people outside their home:
  - Have supervision/monitoring done by someone the child is regularly in contact with (ex. member of the child’s household, childcare provider).
  - Limit the number of people at in-person visits:
    - Switch from supervised/monitored to unsupervised.
    - No visitors outside of those identified in the court order – offer virtual participation instead.
- Address transportation:
  - Increase ventilation while in transit by opening vehicle windows when children are transported by providers.
  - Reduce transportation time by moving the visit to a location within 15 minutes of the child’s placement.
  - Ask caregivers to transport children to and from a visit to reduce exposure.
- Increase virtual contact if in-person visits are limited or temporarily suspended:
  - Schedule frequent check-ins, texting, good night calls, etc. More ideas available [here](#).
  - Create opportunities for virtual connection with extended family and friends.

To address the anxiety and stress caused by ambiguity, the plan should set a review date (within 4-6 weeks) to discuss how the adjusted plan is working for everyone involved and if in-person contact can be expanded or resumed.

Step 2: If an agreement isn’t reached, hold a shared planning meeting to create a Temporary COVID Aware Family Time Plan.

If parties can’t agree on or if there are special circumstances, the DCYF caseworker will schedule a Shared Planning Meeting within one week.

The goal of the Temporary COVID Aware Family Time Plan meeting is to have a robust conversation to assess the risks and develop a Temporary COVID Aware Family Time Plan. The meeting should include the parents, caregivers, child(ren), visit provider (if already assigned) and professionals. A DCYF or outside facilitator should be included if there is conflict.

The **COVID Family Time Assessment Tool** can be used to:

- Help the team assess the level of COVID-19 exposure risk for the family, caregivers and others, AND Identify Family Time plan changes that can reduce the transmission risk.

Step 3: If an agreement isn't reached, DCYF counsel will file a motion with the court.