



Director-General's COVID-19 UPDATE

Deidre Mulkerin | Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women

Hello colleagues

News that children may all be able to head back to school by the end of the month (as long as we continue to have low COVID-19 transmission rates) is another signal that things are slowly getting back to 'normal'. I'm sure the announcement was greeted with cheers by the many parents who have done an outstanding job managing their children's home learning while continuing to work. Thank you to all of our partners who have continued to deliver for Queensland children, young people, families and women in these circumstances.

Since early in the pandemic period, I know we have all been focussed on meeting the needs of children, young people and families. For our young people in residential care, a diagnosis of COVID-19 could impact not just the young person but also the whole household. I know that you have been working hard to minimise any impacts. If you have any questions in relation to COVID-19 and young people in residential care, I encourage you to not only look at a number of FAQs we have published on our [COVID-19 webpage](#) but also to contact your child safety service centre (or child safety after hours service centre — 1300 681 513) for advice.

Young people in Supported Independent Living Services (SILS)

Across our system we also have a number of young people in SILS. With current social distancing and increased isolation it is important that we continue to monitor the health and wellbeing of these young people. Thank you for making additional checks on these young people, and encouraging them to contact their child safety officer should they need extra support due to COVID-19.

Of course, protecting yourselves and your staff is also important. Any staff making face-to-face visits should continue to use personal protective equipment (such as wearing a mask and gloves), practice appropriate social distancing, and maintain hygiene practices by washing their hands regularly.

Video conferencing options

Service providers, like many organisations, including ours, have turned to phone calls and video conferencing as an alternative to face-to-face meetings with colleagues and clients.

In discussions with our colleagues it's clear that there are a variety of different programs being used to support this new way of working. Based on advice we've received, either Skype or Microsoft Teams are our recommended options for video conferencing and engaging with clients. These are free platforms that can be used on desktop computers, laptops and all mobile devices through either the Skype or Microsoft Teams applications.

It's important to note that advice from the Queensland Government Customer and Digital Group is that Zoom and WhatsApp are not recommended for day-to-day business, and cannot be used where confidential, sensitive or private information is being shared or discussed.



This is due to privacy and confidentiality requirements under the *Child Protection Act 1999* (Qld), *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Act 2012* and *Youth Justice Act 1992* (Qld), as well as broader provisions under the *Information Privacy Act 2009* (Qld).

If you'd like more details about web conferencing security, the [Australian Cyber Security Centre](#) website is a good source of information.

Looking ahead

Experiences through the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly put greater stress on families who were already struggling, and may have forced some families who were previously coping into more difficult situations.

At the moment, these families may be trying to handle the situation themselves as they face the realities of losing employment, social distancing, home learning, and pressures on household finances.

Over the coming weeks and months, as restrictions start to ease, the challenges for these people may reach breaking point as the financial impact of COVID-19 reaches its peak.

One of the scenarios sector leaders and I have been working through at our regular meetings is a significant increase in the demand for our services as we move out of the COVID-19 crisis. What we can do now to put us in the best position to respond to that demand?

It will also be important as we move into the recovery phase that our messaging is aimed at de-stigmatising the need for support. People who in the past may not have thought about accessing support services may desperately need them, and how these people are viewed (and view themselves) when they access these services will have a tremendous impact on their recovery. I can assure you that, like you, we are focused on continuing to support children, young people, families and women.

For more information on the recovery phase approach I encourage you to view the [Roadmap to Easing Restrictions](#) in Queensland.

For those celebrating Mother's Day on the weekend, enjoy the time your family (whether with those immediate family members or virtually) and continue to look after yourself.

Warm regards

Deidre Mulkerin
Director-General
Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women



