

11 January 2022

COVID-19 sector update

Dear colleagues

Thank you for your continued commitment to delivering services to children, young people and families at this very challenging time. I have a number of issues to update you on this week.

Vaccinations for children aged 5–11

Please find [advice online from the Chief Practitioner for parents and carers](#) seeking their support for the vaccination of all children and young people aged five years and over. Your support to achieve this is also sought.

The following videos from Queensland Health may be of assistance:



[5–11 year-olds can now receive their free vaccine \(30 second version\)](#)

[5–11 year-olds can now receive their free vaccine \(15 second version\)](#)

Family contact

I would like to provide an update in line with the Chief Practitioner's commitment to review the decision to temporarily move away from face-to-face visits in response to the recent COVID outbreak in Queensland. Thanks to everyone that provided feedback this week about the risks, benefits and challenges of this decision, we acknowledge it is a difficult time for many families.

With the numbers of COVID infections in the community continuing to rise and the peak in cases not expected until the end of January or early February, it remains imperative that we continue to do all we can to reduce transmission and keep children, families, carers and staff safe and well. In the coming weeks it is likely that we will be impacted in an even greater way by illness, isolation periods and disruptions to our 'business-as-usual' arrangements.

Accordingly, changes to family contact are still required at this time to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and their carers/families.

Having considered the feedback provided the Chief Practitioner has provided some additional clarity to assist with contact decision making at this time:

- **Family contact should occur via phone or online at this time.** Moving to telephone or virtual contact will help in reducing the number of people children and young people are in

physical contact with outside of their living arrangements and as such in the short term reduce the likelihood of them becoming infected and transmitting the virus.

- These arrangements are **relevant for all children including those residing in residential care settings**.
- Whilst the practice advice at this time is to move to telephone or virtual contact arrangements, the department will consider this in the context of each family's individual circumstances. There will be some **exceptional cases** where it may be appropriate to continue face-to-face contact. If you want to discuss a particular circumstance please make contact with your CSO.
- Where face-to-face contact is going ahead due to an exceptional circumstance, this will be carefully planned with all parties to ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone. Wherever possible, the family contact will occur outside, away from crowds, with appropriate PPE. Staff will have sufficient PPE for themselves, parents and, if required, children and young people.
- Services to discrete communities will occur with consideration of the particular vulnerabilities of First Nations people and only occur in line with local protocols.
- Visitors to CSSCs should be minimised wherever possible. Planned meetings with the Department will continue to be online.
- The capacity for home visits to children in residential care, foster care and kinship care will be limited over the coming weeks, however regular contact with children and young people will still occur via phone contact and facetime wherever possible.

The department is aware that these changed conditions have a significant impact on children and young people and their families and that there have been a number of creative solutions to these issues.

We have heard that some foster carers are assisting children to create videos for their parents, others have accessed creative videoconferencing apps to enliven this family time. While a challenging time, there are some inspiring things happening as we collectively meet the best interests of children and young people.

These arrangements will continue to be reviewed on a weekly basis.

Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs)

We are aware that some providers are contacting the Department to ask for any available Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) or seeking a direct Queensland Health number to access some in a priority manner. While the department is procuring tests and there is a process to procure them for the community services sector, unfortunately we do not have access to any RATs at this time. It is not yet confirmed when we will receive the RATs, but we expect this will be some weeks.

Whilst we understand the difficulty that this poses, you will be aware that this is part of a national supply issue. As soon as we are able to confirm supply and how we will utilise RATs in line with business continuity planning for both the Department and the sector we will communicate this.

Management of Close Contacts

I know many of you are struggling with COVID-19 impacts on your workforce. You may be aware a new health directive for *Isolation for Diagnosed Cases of COVID-19 and Management of Close Contacts Direction (No. 3)* has been released to assist critical industries. However, at this time the list of critical industries does not include child protection or community services.

Please be assured we are in discussion with Queensland Health about the impacts on our workforce and continuity of service delivery and seeking consideration of this by the Chief Health Officer in future directions. We will keep you posted.

If you have concerns about how COVID-19 is impacting your organisation or your clients, please contact your contract manager. For organisations delivering services to children in care, directly or indirectly, please seek medical advice as appropriate if you become aware a child or an associated household member is exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms and contact your CSO or Child Safety After Hours, as soon as possible.

Thank you for your continued support and I hope you and your staff stay safe and well.

Regards

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