



March 24, 2020

Suspension of Individual Community Outings and Home Visits

The Office for People With Developmental Disabilities is hereby directing all providers of OPWDD operated or certified residential facilities to temporarily suspend all community outings and home visits for residents living within those programs, effective no later than March 25, 2020 at 5PM.

Consistent with Governor Cuomo's New York State on PAUSE initiative, this action is required to help stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Community outings, especially home visits, are an important part of people's lives. Unfortunately, community outings and home visits also pose the risk of exposure of COVID-19 not only for that individual and their family members, but also for the other residents and staff at the facility once the individual returns.

Providers are expected to encourage individuals to communicate with their loved ones virtually (e.g., by video conference, telephone) to the extent possible, and should provide any additional emotional or clinical support needed during this time.

Individuals Returning to Their Residential Facility

Any individual who is on a home visit at the time of the implementation of this guidance, and who desires to return to the residential facility, should be permitted to do so. The individual should be screened for symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and have their temperature measured. Please note that any individual returning to their residential facility after the implementation of this directive, may require up to fourteen days of precautionary quarantine within that setting, depending on their community exposure. Decisions as to whether or not a returning individual should be held in precautionary quarantine should be made with consultation by the local Department of Health.

Restrictions on Community Outings

Residential providers should also immediately place reasonable restrictions on community outings, even where such outings are specifically outlined in an individual's plan of care. In general, goals and services related to community outings should be met by alternative means whenever possible. However, at the provider's discretion, individuals should be permitted to leave the residence to engage in low risk community outings such as sitting outside or taking a walk. Individuals should maintain social distancing when outside the residence and avoid groups of people while in the community. Time spent outside the home must be done consistent with precautionary measures outlined by NYS DOH:

https://opwdd.ny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/3.18.2020%20DOH_COVID19_OutdoorGuidance.pdf

Restrictions on Home Visits:

In the event an individual and their family agree that a long-term home visit is appropriate, such an extended visit should be encouraged. Families should be reminded that, while a restriction on the return of the individual to the residence is expected to be temporary, we are unable to provide an exact date on which this restriction will be lifted. Providers should strive to ensure that families are prepared to meet the needs of their loved ones at home, including having an adequate supply of medication, for an extended period of time.

Should individuals residing in an OPWDD certified or operated residential facility engage in such an extended home visit, the time away from the facility may be billed as therapeutic leave, consistent with current waiver rules.

OPWDD recognizes that the temporary loss of residential services or restrictions on the ability of individuals to have community outings is a significant hardship for the individual and their family. It is OPWDD's goal to ensure that the health and safety of all individuals, families and staff. These restrictions will be lifted as soon as possible.