

Department of Human Services Advises Providers and Partners of Operational Recommendations for Yellow Phase Counties

Harrisburg, PA – The Department of Human Services (DHS) today released guidance for its providers as counties enter the yellow phase stressing continued vigilance for mitigation efforts to prevent a resurgence of COVID-19.

The guidance comes in addition to the guidance outlined in Governor Wolf's [Process to Reopen Pennsylvania](#). Governor Wolf [announced](#) that a total of 57 counties will have moved from the red phase to the yellow phase by Friday, May 29 with 18 counties moving to green the same day. All remaining red counties are expected to move to yellow on June 5.

“We have made a concerted effort to protect the vulnerable populations that we provide services for throughout this health crisis, and as we begin to reopen the state, we must be sure to continue that effort by continuing to use flexibilities that allow for social distancing and remote services,” said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. “Time is our ally in this process, and while I know we want to resume something close to normal life, we cannot rush this process. Yellow is still a period of extreme caution, and we must heed this so we can continue to progress towards green.”

All DHS providers in yellow-phase counties must continue to strictly follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidance. Specific guidance for providers is as follows:

Child Care

DHS's Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) has previously [issued guidance](#) to child care providers in yellow-phase counties. When a county moves to the yellow phase in the governor's plan, all child care providers are permitted to reopen without a waiver. Stimulus funding issued to providers can help ease costs associated with reopening so providers can purchase supplies necessary to keep facilities clean and staff and children protected. Child care providers preparing to open must familiarize themselves with and be prepared to implement CDC [guidance](#). OCDEL will continue to communicate regularly with providers. Communications from OCDEL can be found on the [DHS website](#) or through the [Pennsylvania Key](#).

Visitation for Residential Settings

Providers should continue to follow the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Guidelines for Long Term Care Facilities for guidance regarding visitation restrictions in residential settings due to the continued risk of COVID-19. The yellow phase still requires “aggressive mitigation efforts” and as such, providers should continue to facilitate contact for residents and families through video conferencing and other means to help residents and families stay connected when they are unable to visit in-person.

DHS continues to monitor and issue guidance as the situation evolves. Guidance will continue to be issued as necessary for counties operating in yellow and when counties prepare to move to the green phase.

Home and Community Based Services (HCBS)

Providers working with individuals in the community are receiving guidance from DHS's Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) and Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL) to determine, for each individual, which services may be resumed in-person and what support the individual must receive in order to be able to safely resume activities or engage in new activities. Services should still be received remotely as much as possible.

ODP has also provided service-specific guidance for providers of community participation supports, supports coordination, residential services, transportation, and small group or supported employment in yellow-phase counties. This guidance includes:

- Continuing to provide services remotely or in private homes whenever possible.
- Limiting activities to no more than three participants.
- Implementing visitation restrictions in accordance with the CDC guidance, as applicable, in residential homes at the discretion of the residential provider after a risk assessment of individuals who reside in the home.
- Implementing screening protocols for visitors and the continued use of protective masks for staff for the entirety of service provision.

Behavioral Health Services

Telehealth continues to be the preferred method for delivering behavioral health services during the yellow phase..

Individuals who require in-person services should wear masks as much as possible, and providers and staff should also adhere to mask guidelines. However, there may be situations where masks could trigger anxiety or trauma. OMHSAS recommends providers ask individuals if they have concerns about the use of masks for themselves or by the professionals with whom they will interact, provide options for delayed service or telehealth, calmly discuss the purpose of PPE, and, when possible, wear masks made with fabric with more pleasant imagery to help ease the situation.

Child Welfare

County child welfare agencies are still expected to respond appropriately to allegations of child abuse and neglect including face-to-face visits when necessary. Returning to their county office or maintaining a remote workforce is a decision made at the county level in accordance with state guidance for the yellow phase.

Youth in foster care have been completing family visits using technology. Consideration for moving to face-to-face visits with appropriate protective masks and social distancing will be managed on a case-by-case basis depending upon the needs of the child and family while assuring appropriate health and safety precautions. When determining permissible activities and services for children and families who may live in different counties, during the transition from red to yellow adherence to the highest level of directive when both red and yellow phases of the State are involved should be maintained.

Employment and Training (E&T)

E&T providers in yellow-phase counties must accept new electronic referrals, provide remote enrollments for E&T programming, and should continue completing remote activities with their participants.

Providers that do intend to have any in-person intake/orientation during the Yellow Phase must follow safety protocols established by their facility or PA CareerLink®. Participants may be scheduled for one-on-one meetings of no more than two hours in length, and participants with childcare constraints are permitted to bring their children. They must, however, practice appropriate social distancing and wear masks, when appropriate. After this initial meeting, participants will be required to complete remote activities.

Additionally, referrals will continue to be processed for E&T programs like KEYS, SNAP 50/50, and Family Works applications for ELECT. These contracted programs may continue to submit reverse referrals to the County Assistance Offices (CAO) if they can perform intake procedures remotely and the individual already has the ability to participate remotely.

CAOs in yellow-phase counties will reopen following adjustments to facilities necessary to keep staff and clients safe. Pennsylvanians are encouraged to use DHS' online applications and resources to apply for assistance or submit paperwork as necessary.

Visit pa.gov for a [“Responding to COVID-19” guide](#) or the Pennsylvania Department of Health's dedicated [Coronavirus webpage](#) for the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19.