



Crossroads Family Services

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An Update for Our Foster Families about COVID-19 and Our Agency Response

For all our programs and agencies with the Family Solutions Group, the well-being and safety of our clients, colleagues, and communities are our top priority. Just like you, we are monitoring new developments regarding COVID-19 closely.

Our priority is to ensure that kids and families stay safe and continue to thrive.

Crossroads' current health and safety plan is based on Alberta pandemic phases guidelines, and updates from Health Canada and Alberta Health and Wellness. The plan is dynamic and will be revised based on updated information as we receive it.

As we have all received direction from public health authorities to practice 'social distancing' as much as possible, and to practice self-isolation if there is sickness in our homes, we will work with our families and Children's Services to ensure that we are supporting you and meeting your needs as well as meeting requirements in legislation.

KEEPING OUR FAMILIES CONNECTED

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS –

We encourage all our families to monitor information being provided to all of us from reputable sources:

Alberta.ca – Coronavirus Info <https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx>

Alberta Health Services (AHS) - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.aspx>

AHS COVID-19 Self-Assessment - <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Journey/COVID-19/Pages/COVID-Self-Assessment.aspx>

Gov't of Canada – <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMUNICATIONS -

We have been receiving updates from Children's Services about how they will be proceeding at this time to meet their legislated commitments while also following the direction of health authorities. All foster families in the province should have received a phone and/or email communication today from a representative of Children's Services. You will be receiving a call from your FCSW as soon as possible this week to follow up with you,

Out-of-province travel approvals CANCELLED – We were notified today that out of province travel is NOT authorized for any foster children at this time. This policy will remain in place until otherwise determined. This is probably just as well – it seems prudent that we should all stay close to home until we know more about how the spread of COVID-19 will impact us.

Supporting families while children are not in school - Our most recent update from Children's Services has to do with the recent school closures. Children's Services has acknowledged that many of you will be very stretched to care for "cooped-up" children with complex needs.

Accordingly, the provincial Children's Services director has announced that families can make additional alternate childcare arrangements to accommodate these additional demands, and that they will be reimbursed for those costs with no preapproval required.

Please keep Crossroads up to date about any additional caregiving needs/supports in your homes and we will update caseworkers.

COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR CROSSROADS TEAM -

In-office visits – Our office continues to be open for business at this time. We have taken several extra steps to ensure office cleanliness and have taken many precautions to ensure all our safety, including daily sanitizing of surfaces and packing away the toys that were in the waiting room.

If you are healthy and well, then by all means come and visit us at our office, to bring in paperwork or for pre-arranged meetings with your FCSW. If you or others in your household are not feeling well in any way, if you have traveled outside of Canada within the past 14 days, or if you have interacted with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, then you should follow the directions of local public health authorities for self-isolation. We have directed our staff who meet the above criteria to work from home instead of coming into the office.

Communication with your FCSW – In order to remain in touch with all of you, while still trying to avoid unnecessary contact, the FCSW team will connect with you through phone calls and/or video conferencing whenever possible, instead of coming to your home. Please let your FCSW know if you have a webcam on your laptop/desktop computer for online communication.

Agency information updates – Please check your email and our website [<https://crossroadsfs.ca/>] for updates on information we receive from Children's Services, and on changing agency practices as we adjust to new government information.

NEW ONLINE Crossroads Foster Family Support Group - We will be introducing regular online support group meetings that will be 'livestreamed' through your computer. Our first online meeting is scheduled for this Thursday, March 19th, from 11:00 – 12:00. We will send you an email with a link to the livestreamed support group event. The event will be interactive - you will be able to type in questions or comments for us to respond to. Our format will consist of a Q&A update on the pandemic situation and the response in the foster care sector, and then some teaching and 'group support' time. We will record and post the contents, so if you are unable to participate at the scheduled time, you can review it when it is more convenient for you.

This online format will be new for us, so we welcome your feedback. We are hoping to create an informative and supportive ongoing group format - let us know your thoughts!

FOSTER CARE PROGRAM OPERATIONS – Pandemic Phase

In compliance with the health authority direction to practice social distancing, Children’s Services has adjusted some of their legislative expectations. This has allowed us to modify our program and limit in-person meetings as much as possible.

If caseworkers do want to come to your home for visits/meetings, remember that you have the right to ask screening questions to determine if they are well, and you have the right to decline attending group meetings or have a worker come to your home if you believe the person may be unwell, or if someone in your home is unwell.

FOSTER HOME ILLNESS

- If you have any questions about the COVID-19 illness call: Health Link - (811), Edmonton (780) 408-LINK 5465. Please note that long waits have been reported to get in contact with someone through 811 – please continue calling until you are successful
- Foster parents are to care for themselves and their household children **at home** as they would for a normal flu.
- **Do NOT** take sick individuals to a doctor simply because you suspect they have the illness. Don’t take them out in public. **DO** provide treatment for the symptoms (Advil etc. for fever, and pain as directed by Health Link/the child’s doctor), plus lots of fluids and rest. **DO** call Health Link (811) for further direction.

Notify Crossroads IF ...

- ...your foster child or anyone else in your home is sick. Practice self-isolation to prevent further spread of the illness.
- ...the sick person has been in contact with someone at risk (e.g. someone who travelled in an area with confirmed COVID-19 or who has been in contact with someone else who has a confirmed test).
- Crossroads will notify the child’s caseworker.

Notify Crossroads *AND* complete a Critical incident report IF ...

- ...the child’s condition worsens (or they have an underlying health issue)
 - contact Health Link (811) to get advice about whether to take the child to a Doctor, or to a Hospital.
- ...the child **DOES** have a **confirmed** case of COVID-19

LICENSING HOME VISITS

- At this time, **all upcoming March Licensing visits have been cancelled** by Children’s Services. We have been told that the Licensing unit will be extending any expiring licenses for another three months.

FOSTER PARENT TRAINING

- The Training Unit has notified us that they have **cancelled all scheduled training events** until further notice.

HOME VISITS AND SERVICE TEAM MEETINGS

- if at all possible, these meetings will be completed by phone or video conference.
- If a child's caseworker or CSD worker insists on going to your home to talk with the child, we will decide on a case-by-case basis if a FCSW should support their families in person or by phone/video conference.
- PKIC medical appointments – the decision about having a FCSW attend these appointments will be made on a case-by-case basis.
- PRAT meetings – some components of PRAT matters already occur through phone conference calls. Agency staff will continue to support our families – whether in person or by phone will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

BIO-FAMILY VISITS

- It is an ongoing legislative requirement to maintain a child's connections as much as possible. We have been advised to collaborate with a child's caseworker on plans for family contact that factor in safety and the most current advice from Alberta Health.
- We have started to receive some caseworker/CSD notifications about cancelled family visits. For visits that have not been cancelled, discuss with the service team the possibility of replacing face-to-face visits temporarily with phone contact or video conference, etc. (blocked calls from the Foster Home).

NEW PLACEMENT VISITS

- Foster parents with open beds in homes with no sickness will need to confirm that they will accept new placements during this time of pandemic. We will not place children in homes that are self-isolating.
- FCSWs will continue to complete 'new placement' visits to ensure children receive proper orientation to our foster care program. It is preferable to conduct a home visit, but in some cases a video conference contact may be possible.

Thank you, everyone, for your commitment to the health and wellbeing of children placed in your care during this unsettling time. We will do whatever we can to support you during this time of change.

The government is in process of figuring out how best to respond to caregiver needs – send us your questions and concerns and we will try to get answers for you.

**Stay tuned for our upcoming online SUPPORT GROUP
this Thursday March 19th from 11:00-12:00.
Look for your email with a link to join the group.**

ABOUT THE COVID-19 VIRUS

Every year kids and adults come into contact with various viruses, germs and bacteria that make them sick. Most of us call this a cold or the “flu”. Right now, we are faced with a new virus that people have not been exposed to before.

The current risk for Canadians remains low; and the outcomes are very good for those who are under the age of 65. However, we want to be proactive and address the growing concern. Some news reports are quite alarmist, while others are more cautious about how severe the impact may be in our part of the world. At the point of this writing (March 17, 2020) the numbers of confirmed cases have continued to increase in Canada and abroad.

SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of COVID-19 can be very mild (especially for children and healthy adults) but can be more serious in older people, or those with other conditions. It appears to be mild in about 80% of cases reported so far. Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to the virus.

Symptoms can include:

- sudden onset of unusually high fever (>100.5F or 38C)
- shortness of breath
- dry persistent cough
- One or more of sore throat, joint pain, muscle pain, or extreme exhaustion

HOW IS COVID-19 SPREAD?

The COVID-19 virus is a pneumonia-type virus, and is spread from an infected person through:

- droplets from the infected person when they cough or sneeze
- close personal contact (including touching or shaking hands)
- touching something with the virus on it, then touching your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands

The COVID-19 virus is NOT known to spread through ventilation systems or through water.

PREVENTION

Remember that because COVID-19 is a virus, antibiotics will not cure the infection. At this time, there are no immunizations, or medications found to be useful in preventing the development of this virus.

The best way to prevent the spread of infections is through good hygiene:

- thorough hand washing with soap or sanitizer (wash for at least 20 seconds)
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, especially with unwashed hands
- cough and sneeze into your sleeve and not your hands
- keep personal items separate in the household (e.g. don't share hand towels, don't keep everyone's toothbrushes in the same cup, etc.)
- don't share personal items or drinks
- Clean surfaces often with an antiseptic cleaner
- Social distancing:
 - Avoid crowds
 - avoid close contact with people who are sick
 - stay home if you are sick to avoid spreading illness to others

Develop a plan with your network of family and friends in case you need to self-isolate. Please be sure all medications are up to date. If you are caring for a child who is considered medically fragile, please discuss any specific concerns you have directly with the caseworker.