

# Novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for foster and kinship carers

As at 24 March 2020

The health and wellbeing of our children and young people, and our foster and kinship carers who care for them, are our top priority.

We're working closely with Queensland Government agencies in response to the evolving situation of COVID-19 in Queensland, and we're providing you with the most accurate information as quickly as possible, so that you're supported during this challenging time.

It's important that you stay informed about what's happening with COVID-19. Please visit the [Queensland Health website](#) for information on:

- what is COVID-19 and how it spreads
- what you should do if you have COVID-19
- what you should do if you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19
- when to self-quarantine

### 1. Who can I talk to about COVID-19 and my duty of care to a child or young person?

Please talk to your foster and kinship care agency if you have any questions or concerns about COVID-19 and how it may impact you and the child or young person in your care.

You can also talk to your child safety service centre or call the Foster and Kinship Care Support Line on 1300 729 309.

### 2. What information about COVID-19 do I need to give to Child Safety or my foster and kinship care agency to help inform decisions and planning?

You will need to provide information on whether any member of your household:

- has returned from overseas recently
- has cold/flu symptoms
- is in self-quarantine or home isolation
- has/have had a COVID-19 diagnosis or has been in close contact with someone who has
- is immunocompromised or at a higher risk to complications from COVID-19.

### 3. Should face-to-face meetings or home visits to carers be limited?

Yes. It's important to follow the advice from [Queensland Health](#) for you and your family to stay safe.

We may arrange to make contact with you by telephone, Skype or similar. For new contact arrangements, we may ask if you can download a suitable app or can access a device with a suitable app so the child in your care can talk by video call over the internet.

These arrangements will be made for carer assessments, re-assessments and case planning discussions with your child safety officer.

### 4. Will Covid-19 responses impact family contact visits?

Yes. In line with advice from Queensland Health, members should not be physically present in family contact meetings if they:

- have returned from overseas recently
- have cold/flu symptoms
- are in self-quarantine or home isolation
- currently have/have had a COVID-19 diagnosis or been in close contact with someone who has.

It's important for children and young people to maintain connections to their parents, siblings and families, particularly in times of uncertainty or stress.

Maintaining family contact is a legal requirement. It's critical to maintain relational permanency for all children and the Child Placement Principle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

The health of everyone in your household is important. We'll assess family contact visits on a case by case basis and plan *how* contact will be made, rather than *if* contact will be made.

### How will family contact visits change?

In most cases, it's not a question of 'if contact visits occurs' but 'how contact visits occurs'. Here are some steps we will take to guide how family contact visits will change:

- **Check that people do not have cold/flu symptoms** — if anyone involved in the family contact visits displays cold/flu symptoms, please call your child safety officer. This includes carers and your family members, the child's family members and child safety staff.
- **Check if people are immunocompromised or at higher risk of complications from COVID-19** — as per Question 2, child safety staff will consider information from carers and parents about their risks to COVID-19. This includes:
  - elderly people
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 60 years of age
  - people with pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease

If any person involved in the family contact visits has received medical advice to self-isolate, and are actively taking steps to do so, then contact arrangements will be adjusted. Child Safety will make alternative arrangements by telephone, Skype meeting or similar.

- **Consider the location** — this will be considered in line with advice from the [Australian Government](#) on public gatherings.
- **Maintain good hygiene practice** — it is important we all follow the advice from Queensland Health to help stop the spread of COVID-19:
  - Clean your hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rubs.
  - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or bent elbow when coughing or sneezing.
  - Avoid touching your face, nose and mouth. And avoid shaking hands.
  - Practice social distancing, which includes staying 1.5m away from others as much as you can

### 5. What happens when a child or young person comes into my care and does not display symptoms?

As a carer, you'll receive all information about the child or young person as part of our regional placement processes. This will include any advice on care arrangements or circumstances in which a child or young person may have had contact with someone else who has identified as having COVID-19.

You should also be advised if the child or young person has any medical issues, such as asthma, that may require medical attention if they start displaying COVID-19 symptoms.

You'll need to ensure all required medical aids are available to the child or young person, such as asthma inhalers, Ventolin or any other medication.

If there are any difficulties with obtaining medical aids, please call your foster and kinship care agency or child safety service centre.

The [Carer Connect](#) app will help ensure information about a child's needs is shared quickly. We encourage you to download the app, if you have not done so already.

**6. What should I do if my child's school or childcare closes and I still need to go to work?**

In this situation, please call your foster and kinship care agency to arrange support.

Some carers offer respite care. Carers who offer these short breaks will talk to their foster and kinship care agencies about their availability.

We encourage you to think about your own support networks. Should a child or young person require care while you're at work, you can use your support networks for child care and support for up to 48 hours. This may be particularly important for shift workers.

If you have someone in your own support network who can safely meet the child's care needs, you must talk to your child safety officer about this arrangement and provide the person's name, address and phone number. Members of your extended family, or the child's extended family (for example, an aunt or older sibling), can also help under these arrangements. However, you must also consider the information in question 2 before making this arrangement.

Please talk to your foster and kinship care agency and your child safety service centre about before you make these arrangements.

**7. If I am able to, can I keep the child I am caring for home from school?**

In line with current advice from [Education Queensland](#), parents and carers may choose to keep their children home from school as part of the community response to COVID-19 and should notify their child's school of this decision. Education Queensland advises that absences will be recorded as authorised.

As a carer, you can make this decision for children in their care.

If you choose to keep the child in your care home from school during this time, please contact the school to make arrangements to meet the child's educational needs at home and notify your CSO.

**8. Should I continue to drive the child or young person in my car?**

Yes, you can continue to drive the child or young person in your car to essential appointments in line with travel restrictions that may be in place in your area. For the latest information on travel restrictions, please visit the [Queensland Health website](#).

**9. Can I claim reimbursements without visiting the child safety service centre?**

Yes, the preferred process for claiming reimbursement of pre-approved expenses is through the [Carer Connect](#) app (you can scan and send receipts) or you can post the paperwork to your child safety service centre.

**10. What happens if I or someone in my household displays flu like symptoms?**

If anyone in your household displays flu like symptoms of fever, coughing, fatigue, sore throat and shortness of breath, please call a doctor or 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) immediately.

Once you have received advice from a health professional, please call your child safety service centre and your foster and kinship care agency about the situation.

**11. Who can consent for COVID-19 testing for children and young people in care?**

As a carer, you can consent to COVID-19 testing. Testing for COVID-19 is a diagnostic test and similar to other instances of seeking medical or other health treatment for non-routine, newly presenting conditions. Testing for COVID-19 is a daily care decision that you can consent to.

If a medical practitioner is satisfied that a young person is competent to give consent, then the young person can provide consent.

COVID-19 testing will require a health professional to take a swab from the back of the young person's nose or throat and that swab is tested in a laboratory for the virus.

**12. What happens if I or someone in my household is tested positive for COVID-19?**

You must immediately call your child safety service centre and your foster and kinship care agency to discuss your situation and support needs.

You will be supported to care for everyone in your household in line with medical advice you receive, including any hospitalisation or home quarantine measures that are needed. These responses will depend on the severity of symptoms and any underlying health conditions of other household members.

**13. What support is available if our household is under self-quarantine?**

Please call your child safety service and foster and kinship care agency to discuss support needs.

If required, you can also call the [Community Recovery Hotline](#) on 1800 173 349. This hotline is to help people who have been advised by a medical professional or Queensland Health to self-quarantine at home and have no other means of support.

**14. How do I explain COVID19 to the child or young person in my care?**

It's natural for children and young people to be anxious about what they see and hear as the community works together to respond to COVID-19. There are a range of available resources to help you explain what is happening to the child or young person in care:

- [Headspace](#) — information for young people about coping with stress related to COVID-19.
- [Emerging Minds](#) — a range of resources, including a video, fact sheets and useful tips, to help parents and carers support children and reduce worry and distress.

**15. A child in my care is due to travel overseas shortly. Should the planned overseas travel proceed?**

No. You will find that latest advice on the Australian government's [Smartraveller](#) website.

**16. Are court matters still proceeding?**

The courts are currently open and operating. As the COVID-19 situation evolves, the courts may reduce services for other court matters, however, child protection will remain a priority.

If the situation worsens and there is widespread illness, courts may be closed in affected areas (regional closures). Your child safety officer will inform you of any changes to court dates and court processes.