**COVID-19 - State of Emergency – Investigation Initiation Guidance for Child Protective Services**

This guidance is being issued in accordance with Governor Beshear’s declaration of emergency and numerous orders pertaining to restrictions on state travel, office visitors, and in-person services.

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**Centralized Intake (CI)**

CI staff are expected to gather more information about each referral, including the family’s access to virtual platforms, internet service, and phone numbers. CI staff should also collect information about the application of the COVID-19 screener, to facilitate the decision-making and precautionary measures of investigative staff and their supervisor. Their procedures otherwise remain largely unchanged.

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**Child Protective Services Investigations**

* Child protective services investigative staffshall initiate all investigations assigned a four-hour timeframe following normal procedures. Reports that fall into this category shall be initiated through unannounced, face-to-face contact.
	+ If there are no immediate safety issues identified that would necessitate a child’s removal from the home, follow-up interactions should be completed through FaceTime, Duo, or Skype if available. If the family does not have access to these resources, phone contact is appropriate.
	+ At a minimum, all children in the home should be observed in person for a high risk report.
* In consultation with FSOS, the staff should determine whether the allegations and risk factors presented in an investigation necessitating a 24- hour timeframe should be conducted face-to-face or through other means.
* Initiation of an investigation necessitating a 48-hour or 72- hour timeframe should be conducted through other means, not face-to-face contact.
* For those investigations conducted through other means:
	+ Videoconferencing is preferable, but may not be possible in many situations. Phone contact is appropriate when videoconferencing is not available. Initial telephone contact would be necessary in most cases to arrange for videoconferencing.
	+ All referrals that would not indicate a need for initial face-to-face contact would still require initiation within established timeframes and should include increased attention to collateral contacts.
	+ If an immediate safety concern becomes known to you, face-to-face contact may be necessary after consulting with your FSOS.
* Court-ordered investigations that do not meet acceptance criteria are to be temporarily set aside through April 10th due to the current closure of courts and need to protect staff and clients due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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**General Precautions for All Staff**

1. **Additional Protective Measures**- Staff are encouraged to use the [COVID-19 Screening tool](https://manuals.sp.chfs.ky.gov/Resources/Related%20Resources%20Library/COVID-19%20screener.docx) prior to entering the residence or location. Staff should practice social distancing and should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer following any contact with an individual. Social distancing entails staying 6 feet apart from any person you are in contact with and should be utilized during home visits and in the office settings.
2. **Collateral Contacts-** Staff can and should contact collateral contacts through alternative means (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, Duo, phone, email) and avoid face-to-face contact whenever possible.
3. **Documentation**- Any deviation from established procedure should be well documented to include an explanation of what was or was not done, and the basis for the deviation. This would include documentation of any face-to-face contact that was discontinued due to fear of COVID-19, investigations that were initiated through alternative means other than face-to-face contact, and investigations that were completed through alternative means. This documentation should illustrate the professional judgement you employed and serve as evidence of your diligence and precautions taken in the performance of your duties.
4. **Consultation**- All investigative staff should consult with their FSOS or regional specialists regarding any concerns related to potential exposure to COVID-19. Staff will also consult with their FSOS prior to closing an investigation as “unable to locate” and consult with an SRAA prior to using the “no finding” designation. Consultation may also be necessary to address challenges with identifying services to mitigate risk that would normally be utilized. The DCBS Division of Protection and Permanency is also available for consultation regarding these issues.

As additional information becomes available and/or circumstances surrounding COVID-19 change, this guidance will be updated.