

# Office of Public Guardian Updated Temporary Guidelines

06/29/20

Updates are in red.

Below is the temporary guidance for public guardians.

Since March 2020, regular in-person visits have been suspended due to concerns about COVID-19 and in compliance with the Governor's orders. According to the CDC, individuals with disabilities are three times more likely than adults without disabilities to be at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 if they are 65 and older, live in a group facility, or have underlying health conditions. Guardians themselves may also have underlying health conditions or other risk factors. During the last three months, guardians have been largely successful in maintaining phone and/or video contact with most clients and their team members.

Although the Governor has begun to lift some restrictions, the health and safety of the people in guardianship and of the guardians themselves continue to be of paramount concern. Therefore, virtual contacts between guardians and clients will continue to be the norm for the foreseeable future. Any movement toward the resumption of in-person visits must be thoughtful and gradual. For a trial period, OPG has been given permission by DAIL Commissioner, Monica Hutt, to conduct limited, carefully chosen, in-person, outdoor visits between guardians and clients beginning June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020. A limited number of in-person medical appointments has also been approved.

COVID-19 cases in Chittenden and Franklin Counties appear to be stabilizing. The exposure scare in Lamoille County appears to be resolving. In-person, outdoor visits can be scheduled in again in these counties beginning July 1<sup>st</sup>.

In-person, outdoor meetings can be scheduled at Nursing Homes and other Licensed Facilities (per facility protocol) beginning July 13<sup>th</sup>.

If attending a medical appointment with an individual, guardians must assess the level of precautions that will be followed in the office or hospital setting before agreeing to attend. Experience to date indicates wide variability in compliance with mask wearing, physical distancing, availability of hand sanitizer within medical facilities. Guardians will not attend appointments unless COVID precautions are in place and followed.

Guardians must follow the following precautions during this trial period:

- Visits to individuals who are currently positive for COVID-19 are not permitted at this time.
- Guardians and their supervisors must evaluate the risk status of the clients (and others who live in the same home) in terms of underlying health issues versus the critical need for an in-person visit.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>

- Guardians must obtain permission for an in-person visit from their supervisor.
- Guardians need to discuss the proposed visit with the client, service coordinator and home provider (if there is one) to ensure that all parties involved are comfortable proceeding with the visit.
- During this trial period, in-person, outdoor visits can only be conducted in the following settings: yards, decks, gazebos, walking trails, picnic areas with own chairs, etc. Garages are not approved settings at this time.
- In-person attendance at medical appointments shall only to be considered if the guardian's physical presence is critical. Otherwise, guardian attendance should be conducted virtually.
- In-person visits are limited to no more than 4 people present (guardian, client, home provider, service coordinator, etc.) but less is preferable.
- Guardians will not enter homes, even for a few minutes (rare exceptions will require prior approval from the OPG Director).
- In-person visits are limited to one client per day (unless there are two clients in the same home).
- Guardians will not transport people during this trial period.
- Before leaving for a visit, guardians must perform the health screening below on themselves and call the home and do a phone health screening on the people they are about to visit. **This includes a daily temperature check.**

<b>PRE-SCREENING HEALTH SURVEY FOR EMPLOYEES AND VISITORS ENTERING STATE OF VERMONT FACILITIES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC</b>	Yes No
In the past 14 days have you had close contact with a person confirmed to have COVID-19?	
Today or in the past 24 hours have you had any of the following symptoms?	
Cough	Yes No
Shortness of Breath or Difficulty Breathing	Yes No
Fever (> 100.4°F / 38°C) or felt feverish	Yes No
Chills	Yes No
Muscle Pain	Yes No
Sore Throat	Yes No
New loss of taste or smell	Yes No

- During visits or appointments, guardians must
  1. Sanitize hands before and after a visit.
  2. Wear a mask or face shield during a visit.
  3. Maintain a 6-foot physical distance.
  4. Expect others to wear a mask, if tolerated.
  5. Maintain a log of all visits, all attendees, dates, and times for contact tracing.

## How to Decide

Unfortunately, there is no precedent for a decision-making criterion about whether or not to visit someone. The guardian and their supervisor will have to do their best by asking themselves a series of questions and by weighing out the risks and benefits. If they are at an impasse, the supervisor will bring the request to the Director and the other supervisors for consideration. Here are a few suggested questions:

1. What is the goal of the visit?
2. What is the extra benefit of seeing the person?
3. Is the person at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19? Are other people in the home at high risk?
4. Are there other people who are already in personal contact with the person and able to assess wellbeing?
5. What are your biggest concerns about not seeing the person in-person?
6. Is the person and their SLP (if there is one) comfortable with you doing an in-person outdoor visit?
7. Does the person's service coordinator agree with your visit?
8. Do the potential benefits of an in-person visit outweigh the potential risks to both you and the individual?
9. Do you think the person will be able to maintain the physical distance of 6ft?

## Minimum Requirements?

There is **no minimum for the visits**. If the guardian and their supervisor agree that it does not make sense to do any visits at this time, they will not plan any visits.

In addition to planned visits, situations may arise organically for consideration with the supervisor.

## What To Bring To a Visit

If the guardian is doing an in-person visit they **must** bring:

- A mask or face shield
- Gloves (just in case)
- Hand sanitizer
- Sanitizing Wipes
- 6 ft metal tape measure or some other object (to help define the 6 ft physical distancing)

**Guardians are encouraged to bring:**

- A folding chair for yourself
- Disposable urinal (just in case!)
- Sunscreen, bug repellent, etc.
- Spare masks
- Small garbage bag for wipes, urinal, etc.

The Office of Public Guardian will monitor status of the COVID-19 virus in the state and the efficacy and safety of the in-person guardian visits during this trial period. Plans for phase two will be developed based that information and/or changes in the Governor's orders.

**Additional Resources:**

- VDH Screening Guidelines can be found here:  
<https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/COVID19-Visitor-Screening-Tool-Congregate-Settings.pdf>
- DAIL COVID-19 page here: <https://dail.vermont.gov/novel-coronavirus-information>
- CDC guidance on proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):  
<https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/ppe/ppeslides6-29-04.pdf>