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## THE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SYSTEM AND COVID-19: Frequently Asked Questions

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This document answers common and pressing questions about services for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities and their families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. DRO encourages you to put your health and safety first. Also, please understand that this situation could change. As always, if you have specific questions about your services, please call our intake line at 614-466-7264 or 1-800-282-9181, press option 2, and leave a message. We will call you back as soon as possible.

### **Where can I get up-to-date information, guidance, and help during the state of emergency?**

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities' (DODD) online [COVID-19 Resources and Support](#) is the central DODD resource page for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, their families, direct support professionals and other service providers, county boards of developmental disabilities, and the community at large.

[Your county board of developmental disabilities](#) should be a good source of information and guidance, too. [DODD support teams](#) are also available to help.

The Ohio Department of Health has [a webpage](#) on COVID-19 restrictions, symptoms, spread, and prevention.

### **I am enrolled in a waiver program and need more services. What should I do?**

You should talk to your service and support administrator (SSA). DODD is currently allowing increases in homemaker/personal care aide and respite services. DODD is also temporarily waiving prior authorization requirements for all services (except home modification requests, though the state is making these decisions more quickly).

For people enrolled in the Individual Options waiver program, DODD is allowing people to exceed caps within their existing budgets.

If you are enrolled in the SELF or Level One waiver program, these programs typically have many limits on services. Talk to your SSA if you need more services that may exceed these limits. For example, the Level One waiver



covers emergency services of \$8,520 over a three-year period which could be utilized for an increased amount of homemaker/personal care services, respite services, assistive technology, and other supports. The state of Ohio is also allowing people more flexibility to funding through the Level One waiver, up to \$58,232 a year.

You may want to ask to enroll in the Individual Options waiver program if the SELF or Level One waiver can no longer meet your needs. The county board should do a **waiting list assessment** and decide what your unmet needs are and how they can be met.

### **I am not on a waiver but need services. What should I do?**

Call your county board of developmental disabilities to discuss your needs and available services. You should ask **your county board** to conduct an **Ohio Assessment for Immediate Need and Current Need (also known as the Waiver Waiting List Assessment)**. If the situation is an emergency and you need services immediately, tell this to the county board. You may disagree with the county board's assessment of your needs and how those needs will be met. You have the right to challenge these decisions through the **Medicaid state hearing process**.

### **What should I do if DODD or the county board proposes to cut or end my services?**

Fortunately, DODD has said that the state is not planning on waiver disenrollments during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you receive a notice of disenrollment, feel free to contact DRO.

It is possible you could learn that your services will be cut. Examples of these cuts could include a reduction in the services you currently receive, like replacing your nursing care with aide services. Hopefully this will not happen during the COVID-19 pandemic, but if it does, contact DRO immediately.

### **I am concerned my direct service providers will not be able to continue providing services to me during the pandemic?**

Direct service providers, including SSAs and independent and agency providers, are considered essential workers under Ohio Department of Health Director Acton's stay-at-home order. These providers can continue to support people with disabilities while following orders of the Director, DODD, and best practices found at **[coronavirus.ohio.gov](https://coronavirus.ohio.gov)**.

However, providers themselves could get sick, or may be self-quarantining to avoid getting sick, or may be caring for a loved one. If this has happened to you, or you are worried it may happen, you should talk to your SSA to develop a plan.

DODD has taken some steps to address provider shortages, like helping current providers and recruiting new providers. The state has decided to allow family members to more easily become paid providers. For example, this includes allowing parents, guardians, or family caregivers of minor children enrolled on the Individual

Options or Level One waiver program to be paid as employees of agency providers. Some children may now need more services since they are home and otherwise typically would have been in school, and there may be no other providers available. Families should speak with their child's SSA about this opportunity.

Shared living can be billed along with homemaker/personal care aide services, though not by the same direct support professional. Independent providers can exceed the 60-hour-a-week limit, with authorization from the person's SSA. And the state has extended provider certifications that were set to expire between March and May.

### **Will group adult day supports and vocational habilitation continue during the pandemic?**

Director Acton's stay-at-home order restricts group sizes to no larger than 10 people, including the staff of the provider, within these buildings. Day services and adult vocational habilitation can now be provided in a person's residence, and providers are encouraged to consider whether remote supports are possible for some individuals.

In addition, many individuals might now require more homemaker/personal care aide services in their homes or respite services because of these restrictions. Group adult day supports and vocational habilitation providers are now authorized to arrange for and provide these services under certain circumstances. You can talk with your SSA about this.

### **What if I had a planned meeting with my SSA or a service provider?**

During the state of emergency, phone calls, emails, or other technology may be used in lieu of any required face-to-face interactions or in-person meetings. Examples may include the Level of Care assessments for eligibility for waiver or ICF services, Waiver Waiting List Assessments, Ohio Eligibility Determination Instrument (OEDI), Children's Ohio Eligibility Determination Instrument (COEDI) and Individual Service Plan (ISP) meetings or service authorizations.

### **What precautions are in place to ensure my health and safety in light of the pandemic when working with direct service providers?**

All Ohio Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs) are required to use a screening tool that asks about symptoms, travel, and temperature of providers to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in these facilities. DODD also encourages all providers of waiver-funded services to use a similar screening process. There is also guidance in place in residential settings to separate and protect residents where there are suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases for other residents.

All licensed facilities must give notice to residents and their legal guardian within 24 hours of the first time they have a positive or probable COVID-19 case within the facility. The notice should not include the name of the resident or staff person, but it is a way to let people know the virus is in the facility and the steps being taken to

keep people safe and healthy.

### **Can I receive visitors at my Intermediate Care Facility or nursing home during the pandemic?**

In order to protect residents of congregate facility settings, Ohio Department of Health Director Acton issued an order restricting access to ICFs and nursing homes to only those personnel who are necessary for the operation of the facility. No visitors of residents can be admitted except for end-of-life situations.

Residents and family members are encouraged to explore remote visiting options as alternatives. Also, there may be situations where the facility must make exceptions to their visitation restriction policies as an accommodation for the resident (for example, if a person needs a family member or provider to facilitate communication, or to meet their need for behavioral supports). You should contact DRO for advice on this.

### **Can I leave my ICF, group home, or nursing home during the pandemic?**

If you wish to leave your residential setting, you should discuss this first with your residential provider and your SSA. DODD advises that you should not leave unless essential for your health or safety, because this poses an increased risk of exposing everyone else when you return. There also may be restrictions on you returning if you would pose a risk to others due to COVID-19.