

For Parents Involved with OCS: Frequently Asked Questions During the COVID-19 Crisis

What is the OCS response to COVID-19?

OCS is working to protect the children, birth parents, resource parents, and OCS staff from risk of unnecessary exposure.

Additional steps OCS is taking to limit the spread of the COVID-19 Virus include:

- Allowing staff to use video conferencing when appropriate.
- Promoting the continued use of video conferencing and telephone contact when individuals are in quarantine or unable to participate in person for family contact.
- Implementing temperature checks for OCS visitors.
- Practicing social distancing and universal health precautions when in-person contact is required with an individual who is unwell.

Many OCS staff are telecommuting for work duties when possible. All staff in the office are being reminded to wash their hands frequently and ensuring public spaces are following the current local, state and federal guidelines on health & safety guidance on sanitizing workplaces and masking practices.

Will an OCS Specialist come into our home?

Caseworkers should be completing their monthly caseworker visits. Also, OCS staff will be coming into your home if there has been a report of suspected abuse or neglect of a child in the house.

If my child is in foster care, how will I have contact with my child, and how can I know how they are doing?

The current public health crisis has been hard for everyone in Alaska, but we know it is especially hard for you. Please know, OCS is doing everything in its ability to ensure safety for your children in care. In person family contact is the preferred method. Participants are temperature checked and masks are required for family contact.

If a family member is sick or under quarantine, Resource Families are asked to provide family contact via Skype, Zoom, or other video technology. Resource Families have also been encouraged to allow liberal phone contact for children with their families. If this is not what you are experiencing, please contact your OCS Specialist or their supervisor via phone or email. You may also contact your OCS Specialist or the child's Guardian ad litem with any questions about the health or other areas of concern for your child.

Tips for making the most out of your virtual visits:

- Birth to 1 year old: read, sing, talk about simple concepts such as colors, shapes, play "Peek a boo" "Head and shoulders knees and toes," ask your baby questions and wait for them to respond, use eye contact as much as able to do so
- 1-5 year old: read, sing, play go fish with a deck of cards, play tapes and sing along to nursery rhyme songs, use a song you can move/dance to such as I'm a little teapot, going on a bear hunt, establish eye

contact if possible, have both the caregiver and parent read the same book together to your child, learn about a new animal, play “Simon Says,” have a tea party together

- Elementary school-age: read, dance virtually, help with homework, share a family story, play a game such as a card game, checkers, do the same art/craft such as making pinwheels with paper, paper airplanes, charades, bingo, write a letter together for a family member/sibling, write a story
- Middle/high school age: play a dance/workout routine if possible together, play a mutual game such as word games, bingo, apples to apples, write a shared letter to a family member/sibling, tell a family story, learn origami, play “Would you Rather,” write a story or journaling together

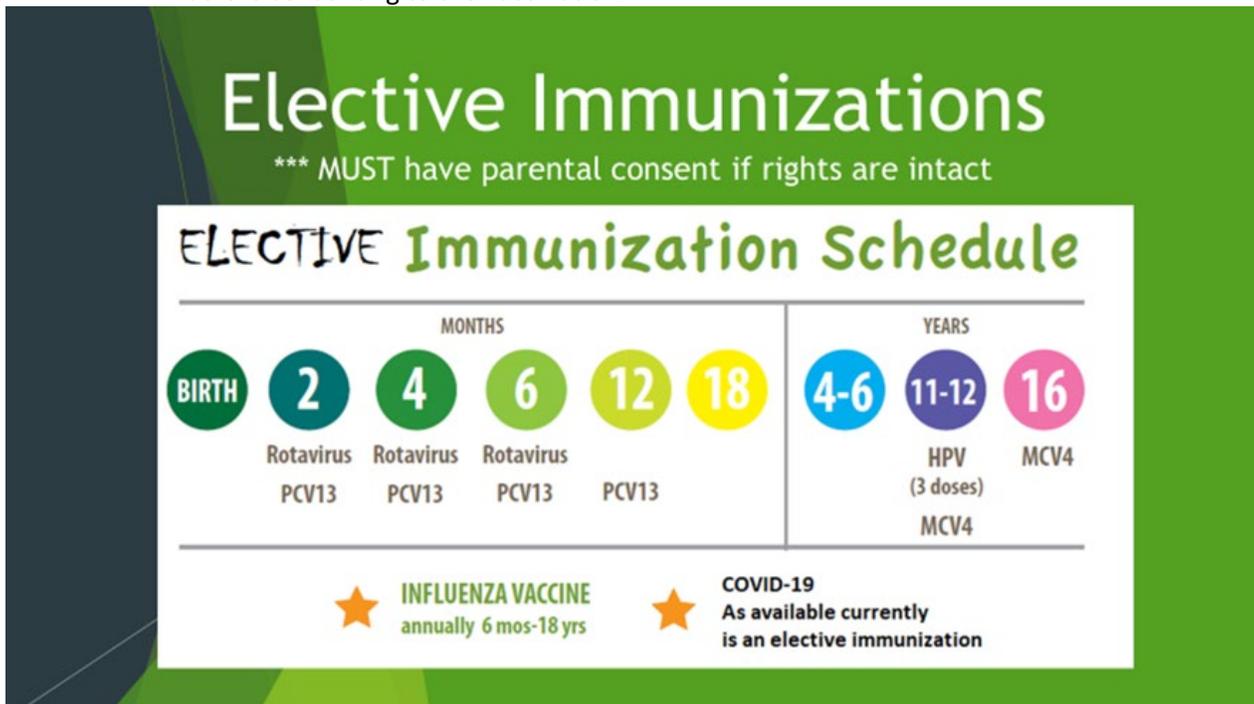
What do I do if my child is sick? Does Medicaid cover testing of a child for COVID-19? Can a parent or foster parent get a child tested?

If a child is ill, or you have concerns, call the office of the child’s Primary Care Provider with any questions. The child’s Primary Care Provider will guide you if the child should come to the provider’s office, emergency room, or monitor the child from home.

If a medical professional determines that it is medically necessary to have a child tested, Medicaid will cover the cost for the test. If your child lives in a foster care setting, you will be notified that the child is being tested.

Can children and youth receive the COVID vaccines? Who can consent to the vaccination?

- See [CDC](#) and [State of Alaska](#) vaccine information.
- The COVID vaccine is considered an elective immunization. This means that the child’s parent or guardian must consent to the vaccine. Consent would need to come from the child’s biological parents, or from OCS in the case that parental rights have been terminated. OCS would notify the legal parties before consenting to the vaccination.



What can I do to keep working toward reunification with my child?

It is important to continue to maintain contact with your children and work with OCS on your case plan goals. Though it may be frustrating having to wear a face covering or have visitation with your child virtually, it’s needed to keep our community safe and slow the spread of COVID-19. Please continue to work with the service

providers you are involved with. If you are unsure of what to do, reach out to the service provider to discuss how they are providing case management. If you miss any important appointments, please let your OCS Specialist know. Remember, stay positive, and as a community, we'll get through this together.

- Remember to keep in contact with your assigned OCS Specialist via email, phone, or text and to provide them with updates on your progress. Please allow your OCS Specialist 24 hours to return your call/email. If you are unable to reach the OCS Specialist after 24 hours, you can call the main office number, and request to speak to their supervisor.
- Contact your current service providers and see what they can do to continue to work with you.
- If you are referred for services during this time, please respond promptly to service providers who may be trying to set up phone calls or "video" interviews with you.
- If you do get sick, please stay inside, and take care of yourself. Notify your OCS Specialist as soon as you can that that you were ill.
- If you are required to participate in substance abuse testing, communicate any transportation or other issues with your OCS Specialist. Some testing facilities have altered their hours and procedures.
- Keep a written journal of all your electronic contacts with your children and everything you are doing to work on your case plan. This should include dates, times, how long the contact lasted, and what was discussed. Share this journal with your caseworker.
- Please attend all court hearings and maintain contact with your attorney. Do not be afraid to contact the attorney to express your concerns.

What if I don't have access to a smart phone or computer?

If you do not have access to a phone, smart phone, or a computer for virtual or telephonic visits with your child, please call your caseworker about the possibility of setting up an appointment at the OCS office.

- Contact GCI to opt into a [lifeline phone program](#). Or call 1-800-800-4800.
- Discuss other options with your OCS Specialist.

Will there be a delay in my child returning home?

OCS encourages all parents to continue to engage in all court hearings and case plan activities. OCS, providers, and others strive to have your child returned home as soon as safely possible. If there are questions about specific case-related information, please contact your assigned OCS Specialist.

What assistance can OCS provide if childcare is an issue with the closure of schools?

OCS can work with parents to find alternative or temporary providers when needed. The Office of Children's Services Childcare team is available at 465-5648 or ocschildcare@alaska.gov, to answer questions and to assist in locating potential childcare options.

Other useful links:

- [Help Me Grow Alaska](#): The go-to place for anything related to parenting your child: 1-833-HMG-ALASKA
- [Thread](#): Connections with Early Childhood Specialists: 1-800-278-3723
- [Alaska CARELINE](#): Mental health emergency counseling: 1-877-266-4357
- [Beacon Hill](#) (Safe Families for Children Alaska): Safe Families Helpline is open 24 hours: 907-277-0925
- [Anchorage Community Mental Health](#): Crisis line and appointments available: 907-563-3200, 24 hours
- [Recover Alaska](#): Substance abuse treatment/information: 907-249-6674
- [AWAIC \(Abused Women's Aid in Crisis\)](#): Crisis and support line at 907-272-0100
- [RCPC \(Resource Center for Parents and Children\)](#): 907-465-9099
- [Tundra Women's Coalition \(Bethel\)](#): Crisis Line 1-800-478-7799

National Hotlines:

- NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Health) HelpLine
 - 800-950-6264, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (EST), Monday-Friday
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
 - 800-273-8255 or Chat with Lifeline
- National Parent Helpline: Parents and caregivers needing emotional support and links to resources
 - 855-4APARENT, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. (PST), Monday to Friday
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's)
 - Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746, TTY 1-800-846-851
- Postpartum Support International: The PSI HelpLine is a toll-free telephone number anyone can call to
 - PSI HelpLine at 1-800-944-4773(4PPD) or text 503-894-9453
- Crisis Text Line: Crisis Text Line is a global not-for-profit organization providing free, confidential crisis intervention via SMS message. The organization's services are available 24 hours a day, every day.
 - Text HOME to 741741
- Childhelp: They help child abuse victims, parents, concerned individuals
 - 800-4-A-CHILD (800.422.4453)
- Darkness to Light: They help children and adults needing local information or resources about sexual abuse
 - 866-FOR-LIGHT (866.367.5444)
- National Domestic Violence Hotline Phone: They help children, parents, friends, offenders
 - 800-799-SAFE (800-799-7233), TTY: 800-787-3224, Video Phone Only for Deaf Callers: 206-518-9361