



March 13, 2020

Guidance for On-Site Visits by State and Voluntary Staff Who Perform Certain Administrative Functions

The following provides interim Guidance regarding administrative and investigative field/site visits to facilities and other locations operated and/or certified by OPWDD. This Guidance applies to all State and voluntary staff who are engaged in administrative functions including, but not limited, to licensing inspections, audits, fire and safety inspections, and other functions not related to services provided directly to individuals. This guidance is based on the most current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and NYS Department of Health (DOH) recommendations for prevention of the spread the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Employees should use this guidance as it applies to their duties and responsibilities related to inspections, surveys, audits, and other types of home/site-based visits made as part of administrative or investigative functions. This guidance is not intended to address every potential scenario that may arise, so employees are encouraged to monitor the New York State Department of Health website and to follow all directives of NY State and local Health Departments. OPWDD will publicize any material changes to this Guidance.

I. General Guidance Regarding Reporting for Work

While NYS has declared a state of emergency, all essential agency functions must continue to be implemented. In order to maintain continuity of operations, all employees should continue to engage in their regularly scheduled activities to the extent possible and until direction is provided otherwise. We anticipate that the spread of COVID-19 will continue to have an impact on the regular course of business, including staffing shortages and other resource issues. For those staff engaged in site visit work, there may be a need to limit in-person meetings and contact. If necessary, staff should discuss with supervisors the use of telephone interviews and other methods to conduct work if in-person visits are not advisable.

All employees reporting to their work sites and/or conducting field visits should consistently and continuously self-evaluate their own health status by reviewing the below questions:

1. Have I traveled to a country for which the CDC has issued a Level 2 or 3 travel designation within the last 14 days? (updated information is available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/locations-confirmed-cases.html>)

2. Have I had contact with any Persons Under Investigation (PUIs) for being exposed to COVID-19 within the last 14 days OR with anyone with confirmed COVID-19?
3. Do I have any symptoms of a respiratory infection (e.g.: cough, fever, trouble breathing, pneumonia)?

If you answer “yes” to more than one of these questions, employees should reach out to their local department of health and direct supervisors as soon as possible for further guidance. If only Question 3 is answered “yes,” employees should reach out to their direct supervisor for additional guidance. If employees have responded “no” to all three questions, they are required to continue to perform their normal duties and responsibilities.

II. Guidance for Scheduled Field Work and Site Visits

Pursuant to OPWDD’s policy entitled *Guidance Regarding Visitors to Residential and Nonresidential Facilities Certified or Operated by the NYS Office for People With Developmental Disabilities*, issued on March 10, 2020, all facilities operated and/or certified by OPWDD should have visitor screening protocols in place. Upon presentation to a field site, staff will be asked the three screening questions listed above. All staff are expected to comply in a professional manner when responding to the screening questions.

When site visits are conducted, employees are expected to follow good hygiene protocols. While there is currently no vaccine to prevent this virus, these simple steps can help stop the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer;
- Avoid shaking hands with staff and service recipients during site visits;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands;
- Avoid close contact with people;
- Stay home when you are sick; and
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

Supervisors should make determinations regarding which field visits are essential and which can or should be rescheduled. Consideration should also be given to which tasks can or should be completed through alternative means of communication, including phone and video conferencing, whenever practicable.

III. Guidance for Unscheduled or Unannounced Site Visits

To ensure that site visits can be conducted as safely as possible, staff should reach out to the site **before** any visit to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Visits to sites where individuals are either in quarantine or isolation should be rescheduled. Field office staff should also review information related to identified areas of the state where there may be a Containment Area, as defined by either the NY State or the local Department of Health. Site visits scheduled to occur in designated Containment Areas should be rescheduled. If any staff member believes there is a compelling need to conduct an unannounced site visit, please speak with your supervisor to determine how to proceed.