

To: All Early Intervention contract managers and FCFC coordinators

From: Nathan DeDino

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Subject: Early Intervention Program Updates, #2122

Earlier this summer ([May 21](#) and [July 26](#)), DODD provided guidance to local EI programs related to updated COVID-19 guidance for EI. With the rapid increase in COVID-19 cases and reports of families and EI providers increasingly being quarantined, DODD is providing additional and updated guidance related to—

- Virtual evaluations
- Method of EI service delivery
- In-person activities in EI
- Written consent
- Initial and annual Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meetings

If you have questions about how this guidance may apply to the situation within your agency, please contact [your EI program consultant](#).

Virtual evaluations

On May 21, DODD provided guidance that EI evaluation and assessment teams should transition from use of virtual evaluations by August 31. On July 26, DODD provided further guidance that, while virtual evaluations could not be a program's general practice, a virtual evaluation remained an option when necessary to accommodate health and safety considerations for families. Since the end of July, COVID-19 cases have increased significantly. Therefore, DODD is extending the flexibility to complete virtual evaluations even if this means that it will be a program's general practice. We would like to underscore that it is not our intention for this to be a permanent method of completing evaluations, and teams must accommodate the needs of families. We will provide a minimum of 60 days' notice ahead of ending this flexibility. You can access guidance about how to complete a virtual EI evaluation [here](#).

Method of service delivery

With the increase in COVID-19 cases in many communities, some local EI programs may be considering changes to their method of EI service delivery. Health and safety considerations are acceptable factors to consider in the context of the IFSP process when making decisions about the method of delivery for EI services. For reasons of health and safety, IFSP teams may decide that some services that have been primarily provided in person during the past several months should transition to a primarily virtual format. As we noted in our May 21 communication, nearly all

statewide public health orders have been lifted. In the absence of these statewide orders and the state of emergency, local EI teams must find ways to accommodate those families who cannot be served adequately through virtual EI service delivery methods. We also remind local EI programs that prior written notice must be provided when changing the method of EI service delivery. Our [recent guidance around documenting method on the IFSP](#) remains applicable, and there are cases where it may be appropriate to document a mixed method of service delivery.

In-person activities in EI

[The joint agency guidance](#) about safely conducting in-person activities in EI remains a useful resource for EI providers. Although certain aspects like the references to the Public Health Alert System and mandate to complete all EI activities virtually whenever possible are no longer applicable, we encourage providers to conduct symptom checks and avoid completing in-person activities with people who have COVID-19 symptoms. We also remind all providers working in EI that they must have policies in place that outline how they will implement best practices related to COVID-19 mitigation and how decisions about method of EI service delivery will be made consistently and equitably across families. EI staff should be aware of and understand these policies, and the local EI program should communicate to families how these policies may affect families.

Written consent

We are also reminding all agencies that informed consent in EI must be obtained in writing. [DODD provided guidance last July](#) after receiving guidance from the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) about written consent. Please ensure your staff are implementing this guidance as it remains a focus of OSEP.

Initial and annual Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meetings

As discussed in our July 26 communication, OSEP has allowed states the flexibility to conduct initial and annual IFSP meetings through virtual means if this is an acceptable method for the family. OSEP is reviewing all of its COVID-19 guidance but has not yet rescinded this flexibility around initial and annual IFSP meetings. Therefore, DODD will continue to allow this flexibility to local EI programs until such time OSEP removes it.

Conclusion

Thank you again for your hard work during the past year and a half to support families during these challenging and ever-changing times. As evidenced by increasing referrals to EI during 2021, your services are of great importance to families during this difficult time. We appreciate your rising to the challenge to meet this important need. If you have any questions about this guidance, please contact [your EI program consultant](#).