

Staff Testing Guidance

July 29, 2020

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) has issued guidance to providers around the subjects of source control and testing of both persons supported and staff. Between July 14th and July 28st, DIDD saw an increase of 85% in the number of staff who have tested positive for COVID-19 and 82% for persons supported, and it has continued to grow at a high rate. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has stated that COVID-19 can be spread unknowingly and unintentionally by asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic persons (those not showing symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough, fever, and/or shortness of breath).

Staff Testing

Based on the increase in the number of positive cases and the knowledge that asymptomatic persons may still spread the disease, DIDD is asking providers to set up a staff testing program as soon as possible. The Tennessee Department of Health has established a procedure specifically for IDD settings to test all their staff each month at no cost to the agency or the person receiving the test. Under this plan, agencies will receive self-testing supplies through a company named Everlywell™. IDD agencies will register online and order their testing supplies. Staff will self-administer the tests and receive the results via email or on Everlywell's online portal. The agency will collect the results from their staff and take the appropriate actions. Agencies will continue to report positive test results for staff to DIDD and will now also report them to TDH at COVID19.testing@tn.gov. DIDD is not mandating staff testing, but we are **strongly** recommending it in response to the increase in positive cases among DSPs. There is even greater urgency to establish a staff testing program if the agency does any of the following:

- Provide services in homes of 4 or more persons supported
- Serve persons supported who are over age 55, have chronic health conditions, or are in the severe or profound range of intellectual disability.

Testing of Persons Supported

TDH has not recommended regular testing of persons supported. Instead, we will continue to do "spot-testing" of persons supported based on having been exposed to someone with symptoms. DIDD will have a limited number of Pathgroup Multi-Swab Specimen Collection Kits

on hand for this purpose. These kits allow for the “anterior nares” (i.e., front-of-the-nose) test method. To obtain these tests, the persons primary care provider must order the test. The order may be sent to DIDD’s Regional Nursing Directors who will arrange for delivery of the testing supplies and assist with testing as needed.

Everyday Precautions

The current circumstances mean that everyone should be diligent regarding daily personal screening for COVID symptoms whether at work or home. Diligent screening will protect staff AND persons supported alike. DIDD recommends staff check their symptoms for COVID using the latest version of the screening questions found on the CDC and TDH websites. If you need any assistance in creating a screening tool, please contact your Regional Nursing Director. We also recommend a screening prior to entering the home of every provider agency. Persons supported should also screen themselves daily. If they are unable to complete the screening themselves, staff should assist them, document the screening in their record, and notify Nursing if any symptoms are positive.

Current guidance from the CDC discusses that the best way to stop the spread of COVID-19 is through a preventive approach called “source control”, which is loosely defined as procedures to keep the virus away from you and/or quickly washing it off or disinfecting. This approach includes all the preventive measures that have been discussed throughout this pandemic including:

- Screening before entry of everyone entering the person’s home or workplace.
- Easy access to hand hygiene whether it is through 20 second washing or disinfectants. Staff need to have constant access to hand disinfectant (best in the staff’s pocket for both convenience and safe keeping). Persons supported should also have this easy access as long as it does not present a safety issue.
- Posters of do’s and don’ts of face coverings
- Training on how to wear protective equipment
- Wearing cloth face coverings or face masks at all times (both at work and in public)
- Routine cleaning and disinfecting of high touch surfaces
- Remember protecting persons supported is our responsibility. Even though we spend a great deal of time with them and love them like family, we need to be mindful of our professional responsibility to social distance.

Additional preventive measures for COVID-19 and information on source control can be found at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-controlrecommendations.html>
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/A_FS_HCP_COVID19_PPE_11x17.pdf
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/A_FS_HCP_COVID19_PPE.pdf
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/hcp/fs-facemask-dos-donts.pdf>

Monitoring

All providers should already have or now establish a plan to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. That plan should include preventive source control measures and a process to verify that DSPs are implementing these measures. Agencies also need to have procedures for when a DSP tests positive for COVID-19. The department has not previously asked to see these plans but based on the increase in the number of positive cases, DIDD will now begin to ask to see a sample of plans from providers. Also, when a staff person tests positive, DIDD may also ask to see documentation that the staff person did not work for the appropriate number of days they were recommended to quarantine based on the TDH guidance in place at that time. These actions are necessary to better understand the impact of measures being taken within our service community and more effectively position us to allocate resources to assist in slowing the current trends. We want to ensure that we all are doing as much as we can to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the vulnerable population we support.

We are thankful for your partnership in this ongoing effort to adapt and adjust to the COVID-19 public health emergency and we are here to support you. If you have questions, please contact your Regional Office Director. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and joint effort to stop the spread of COVID-19.