



Responding to families and carers who advise that they have COVID-19

Practice tips for Service Providers

As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads, there may be an increased number of children, families and carers who are symptomatic, or who have been diagnosed with COVID-19.

You should ask each person being visited (either before or at the time of the visit) a series of questions to understand if there are increased health risks in interacting with them in person.

There may be situations where there are high risks reported for the child/ren and you need to see them and a family member informs you that they have been diagnosed with COVID -19, or they have been medically advised to isolate.

This topic sets out practice advice about how to respond in those situations. This advice should be read alongside your agencies protocols but staff can also refer to the [DCJ health information for frontline staff](#).

Do not make assumptions

Most families will tell you the truth about their health. A small number of people may, at times during the process of your work with them, provide misinformation about their health, due to a range of worries they may have. It is critical that you not to jump to quick assumptions about why they may do so. Reasons may include that they:

- actually have symptoms, been told to isolate or have been diagnosed. In fact, some families we work with may be at more risk of contracting COVID-19.
- not have understood official health advice or have assumed that a cold or flu is the coronavirus
- be fearful that you could bring germs into their home
- be highly anxious in these uncertain times and the thought of child protection visiting them brings heightened fear so they are more likely than usual to deter your visit
- have been told to provide information by someone else to keep you away – for example a woman experiencing violence from her partner may be forced to provide this information to keep you distant

Stay open-minded until you have all available information and do everything you can to think about ways to reduce anxiety and respond compassionately.

Attempt to get information, while also staying safe

If your conversation is taking place on the phone, try to get as much information as possible, as outlined below. If you are at their house, try to speak with them from the front door or ask if you can phone them from outside.

Let them know that you might need to visit them even if they have been diagnosed. Refer to the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) or [tip sheet](#) for more information about how to make decisions about conducting face-to-face home visits.

Respond with empathy

If a family or carer inform you that they have COVID-19, show them genuine empathy and concern. Even if you are of the view that they have provided inaccurate information (see above), it is



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important to respond to them with the concern you would show any other person informing you of this diagnosis.

You could say something like: *'I am so sorry to hear that. That must be such a worry for you and the family. What support are you getting right now or "what help do you need'*

Express the seriousness of COVID-19

Through the use of an empathetic tone and questions and reflections that express real concern, you can communicate how serious COVID-19 is. This will help to shape an appropriate casework response if the person does have COVID-19, or will start to plant the seeds about why other action is needed if they appear not to have COVID-19.

Say: *'What symptoms have you had? How are you feeling right now? Being diagnosed with COVID-19 must have been a real shock.'*

'I feel really worried about you and the family. It must be very hard to manage.'

Reflect back to their responses; examples might be:

'You're really sick that sounds awful' or

'Are you feeling okay. How did you know to go and get tested?' "have you got a doctor or health professional supporting you?'

Ask how it is affecting their family and parenting

Asking information about the health and functioning of the family and their parenting is very important. This will help you to start to understand how they are managing and the health risks for other family members or children in the home. Asking these additional questions will help you to test out the accuracy of what they are telling you and will also demonstrate to them that what they have said is serious and that you are not simply going away.

It is important to ask:

- if anyone else in the house has been diagnosed
- if anyone else is showing symptoms
- if anyone in the house has been advised to self-isolate
- how other members of their family are being protected from contracting the virus.

Ask about parenting, including:

- how they are managing to look after the kids while they are sick
- who else is helping
- how they are getting food and other groceries or medicines.

Say you are worried about the child

Be honest and let them know that you were wanting to speak to them because you had received information and you were worried about their child; and that now that they have advised you they have COVID, that you are worried about them to.



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Depending on what else they have shared with you in this conversation, let them know that this worries you because:

- the children in their care could also get COVID-19
- the family will have to be isolated from other people
- they may not be able to care for their child in the same way if they are sick.

Let them know you need to confirm their health status

Let them know that an important part of what needs to happen when a family tells us that they have COVID is that you need to contact the Public Health Unit to seek advice and determine if they have been told to isolate. Explain that this is to make sure families are getting the support they need and so everyone can stay safe.

Contact your Local Public Health Unit on **1300 066 055** to seek advice based on the available information.

If the family member or carer is confirmed as having COVID-19:

If it is confirmed that the person has COVID -19, seek advice from the Public Health Unit about what they should be doing to look after their health and to protect other family members from it.

Speak to your manager about next steps, and make plans about how the family can be provided with the health support they need and the basic provisions as well as any essential DCJ interventions. Refer to your agencies protocols or the [DCJ advice for frontline workers](#)

Additional information and where to seek assistance

Additional information for service providers including frequently asked questions, tip sheets and practice advice topics is available on the [DCJ website](#). If you need assistance with planning or casework please reach out to either your Permanency Coordinator or local CFDU.