



## COVID-19 Communication

The unique challenges emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic have forced individuals, businesses, cities and entire countries to implement unique responses. Advocates, too, must continue responding in ways that promote both safety and sustainability of vital services. To that end, we are establishing an "Opt-In" requirement for all employees. The purpose of the Opt-In requirement is to certify a commitment by each employee to practice the safety protocols as recommended by health experts and state recommendations. And to verify that each employee is willing and able to provide flexibility as it relates to the needs of the agency during these unique circumstances. In other words, we need unwavering commitments to the children in our care and to the underlying operation which drives our services.

By opting in, employees agree to:

- 1) follow the Social/Physical Distancing recommendation of 6 feet distance from others and wearing a protective facemask when outside your home (or inside your home if there is a sick or symptomatic individual within).
- 2) limit your trips, travels and errands to necessary activities only (i.e. work, household necessities, emergencies).
- 3) keep your surroundings clean and sanitized to the extent reasonable (this might include: disinfecting surfaces in home/office/vehicle, laundering clothes, regular bathing for family members, etc.).
- 4) notify an appropriate Advocates leader if you become symptomatic, test positive or suspect you may have had exposure to the COVID-19 virus.
- 5) accept work-related assignments which are deemed necessary or appropriate by agency leadership (and which may differ from typical assignments due to the challenges we currently face).

Please know that this Opt-In measure was designed to protect Advocates' Essential Workforce, and the clients and families who depend on us. We will continue to march forward as thoughtfully as we can, and we will emerge, stronger, on the other side.

### Reducing transmission among individuals

Workers who are ill with influenza like symptoms or who have a family member with influenza like symptoms are urged to stay home to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Advocates is committed to supporting employees in these situations and will consider flexible leave and work policies as needed, including EFMLA and Emergency Sick Pay.

Again, employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.

If staff develop symptoms while at work, CDC recommends that individuals who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough with shortness of breath) upon arrival, or become sick during the day be separated from others or be sent home. Sick individuals should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available) or wear a facemask. Forehead thermometers will be available at each site to facilitate confirmation of fever for staff and clients. Advocates will protect the confidentiality of people with confirmed COVID-19. There is much more to learn about the transmissibility, severity, and other features of COVID-19 and investigations are ongoing.

## **Protecting people who are at higher risk for adverse health complications**

Infected people can spread COVID-19 through their respiratory secretions, especially when they cough or sneeze. According to the CDC, spread from person-to-person is most likely among close contacts (about 6 feet). Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, like how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It is still under debate the degree to which a person can contract COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes. Some people may be at higher risk for severe illness, such as older adults and those with chronic medical conditions. Please follow CDC handwashing and preventing spread guidelines.

## **Maintaining business operations**

Advocates already practices disinfecting common areas to protect from the spread of disease and infection. In order to reduce the impact of missed work on employees and the business, Advocates makes reasonable accommodations for flexible workplace, flexible leave policies, and to allow an employee to work from home or in a protected area (e.g., closed office), depending on their level of risk and position. Employees working on-site are encouraged to clean and disinfect spaces as needed; regular nightly sanitizing will continue.

Under some situations, an employee may be eligible for leave under EFMLA. Leave taken by an employee for the purpose of avoiding exposure to the flu is not protected under EFMLA. Advocates encourages employees who are ill or are exposed to ill family members to stay home.

## **Minimizing adverse effects on other entities in the community**

[Informational posters](#) are hung throughout AHTL sites, near entry points, sinks and sanitizer stations. Thank you to our fantastic crew for diligently and routinely cleaning all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, like countertops, restrooms, and doorknobs. This is something everyone can participate in – take a few minutes to disinfect doorknobs, surfaces of desks, cell phones, etc.; if you don't know where to find disinfectant cleaners, please ask! We all play a part in keeping the community healthy by keeping ourselves healthy.

Hazardous, infectious disease is everywhere all the time. There is the same amount of travel related illness risk as normal for Wisconsinites unless you are traveling to areas specifically outlined here: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/>. Per the CDC guideline, avoid non-essential travel and refer to the CDC website if you are considering travel outside of Wisconsin or the US.

Advocates is following the advice of the CDC and its partners and will continue to monitor national and international data on the severity of illness caused by COVID-19. Advocates will continue to disseminate the results of these ongoing surveillance assessments and will make additional recommendations as needed.

*Information obtained from:*

**US Center for Disease Control/CDC** ([https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fguidance-business-response.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fguidance-business-response.html))

**OSHA** (<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/>)

**US Department of Labor** (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fmla/pandemic>)

These policies and communications contained herein are subject to revision at any time; employees should refer to email for most up to date COVID-19 guidelines.

**Advocates is committed to reducing the spread of COVID-19 and has taken the following measures to ensure we are meeting our commitment.**

Implementation timeline:

**Effective March 13, 2020**

- Reduced number of staff and clients to less than 50 individuals onsite at any given time.
- Implemented 14-day waiting period for individuals who had traveled outside of the state of Wisconsin to minimize the risk of spreading infection to co-workers and clients for those traveling to locations that are experiencing higher occurrence of outbreak.
- Communicated use of sick-leave and paid time off policy updates.

**Effective March 18, 2020:**

- increased to daily, regular disinfecting of common areas and surfaces and recommendation of periodic, as needed disinfecting.
- designated staff specific to ensuring daily cleanliness of all Advocates sites
- reduced the number of staff at any Advocates site to only "required" staff; all non-required staff moved to remote work or temporary layoff until further notice
- implemented 'staff symptoms questionnaire' and temperature checks at the beginning of all SHARE Academy Group Home shifts
- dedicated staff as point person for COVID-19 related communications
- dedicated attention to developing COVID-19 situation and ongoing review of information from reliable, reputable and applicable federal, state and local sources (CDC, DCF, DHS, DPI, WAFCA, county partners, school districts, etc.)
- Regular, ongoing communication with staff, foster parents, respite providers and community partners regarding safety expectations, supports and changes to service delivery.

**Effective March 20, 2020:**

- Suspended all non-essential in-home and face-to-face meetings and services until further notice; essential, virtual services provided over Facetime, Zoom or Google Video and Microsoft Teams for continuity of care, per contracts and authorizations and according to DHS and HIPAA Business Associate Agreements.
- All essential, in-home visits precluded by 'home wellness questionnaire' to assess for safety and protection of home visitor and residents.
- All essential, face-to-face services precluded by regular communication about household wellness with caregivers. Clients who experience symptoms follow quarantine guidelines before returning to face-to-face services.

**Effective March 23, 2020:**

- prohibited the number of staff or clients in any of Advocates buildings to be less than 10 individuals unless a staff is in a closed-door office
- required administrative staff only be onsite outside of client hours (client hours: 7 AM – 7 PM, Monday-Friday)
- posted requirement for "essential staff only" during client hours at all business entry locations
- adjusted service delivery to provide care using technology in situations where the risk of face to face services does not outweigh the benefit
- adjusted all face to face service delivery to 1:1 staff to client ratio, until further notice
- assigned dedicated team to overseeing required onsite staff, to ensure physical distancing and adherence to safety measures (per CDC guidance and local recommendations)
- implemented a daily leadership huddle to ensure all stakeholders are getting needs met and quality of care remains constant

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- implemented system for providing meals, groceries, hygiene products and financial support to Advocates staff, respite providers and foster families in need.

**Effective March 27, 2020:**

- Obtained written commitment by each staff to adhere to Governor Evers' Safer at Home orders until further notice (*Opt-in Commitment*).

**Effective April 1, 2020:**

- provided safety kits to staff who are required to visit clients in their homes, including instructions, masks, gloves, disinfectant wipes and disinfectant hand sanitizer.
- Committed to check in via phone with each employee, foster family and respite provider to confirm preferred communication method, offer support and provide assistance as needed
- Connected with community to provide additional resources to clients, staff, providers and their families

**Effective April 13, 2020:**

- Implemented staff symptoms questionnaire and temperature checks at the beginning of all onsite staff shifts
- Implemented supplementary learning opportunities for staff regarding the spread and transfer of COVID-19.
- Established Return to Work procedure and guideline

**Effective May 18, 2020:**

- Requirement that staff onsite, in common areas wear a protective facemask in addition safety recommendations already in place.
- Reinforced understanding of Opt-in commitment.

*Additional guidance will be communicated to employees and families primarily via preferred email.*