



COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

DJS is working closely with health experts and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on our operations. In addition to working with MDH and local health departments, DJS is implementing practices and protocols that are both consistent with guidance provided by MDH and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to keep youth and staff safe during the health crisis.

The best interests of the children we serve is a top priority for DJS, as is the health, safety, and well-being of DJS staff and the community at large. During this unprecedented health emergency, DJS is continually reviewing the juvenile detention and committed populations to identify youth that may be safely supervised in the community. In evaluating whether to recommend community supervision, DJS considers factors specific to each youth, including their medical history, the availability of family or other support systems in the community, and ultimately public safety. The best interest of the child weighs heavily when formulating recommendations and when moving to bring a youth's case to the attention of the local courts for review. The courts make the decision on whether to release a youth, and DJS strives to ensure the court has a comprehensive overview of a youth's circumstances, risk level, and DJS' continued ability to supervise youth successfully in the community during this crisis.

To ensure accountability and transparency, DJS conducts weekly statewide update calls with State's Attorney's, the Office of the Public Defender, the Judiciary, and other legislative and state agency stakeholders.

The purpose of this "Frequently Asked Questions" page is to help youth, families and stakeholders answer common questions and concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on DJS's operations. This page will be updated as needed.

Up-to-date information regarding facility-based confirmed cases of COVID-19 and facilities impacted can be accessed on the DJS 24-hour Hotline at 877-357-4161

DJS Facility Youth Services Information

How are families receiving information and updates?

DJS has continued to communicate with parents/guardians regarding the many preventive measures being implemented in our facilities. DJS has developed a process to inform parents/guardians if there is a confirmed COVID19 exposure in their child's facility and has activated a 24-hour hotline where they can obtain access to up-to-date information. For more general updates, DJS has held several informational live streams with families. During those live streams, families can call in or watch the session live on YouTube as DJS executive staff provide updates and answer questions from family members sent via email. DJS plans to continue having family informational live streams as needed to address the questions and concerns of families during this pandemic crisis.

In addition to having regular calls with DJS stakeholders, including the courts, Office of the Public Defender, State's Attorney's Office and others in the community, the Department also remains transparent with staff through various channels of communications. Just like the family live streams, DJS solicits questions from staff and answers them on a separate staff live stream. This is very beneficial for the Department to distribute accurate information related to COVID-19. Additionally, the Department sends regular emails and videos to staff, including important messages from the Secretary. Lastly, the Department reaches staff through confidential group therapy sessions, intranet and internet posts, and through all social media channels.

What if my family needs resources or support?

In each county, DJS has identified at least one staff member to gather community-based resources and support to connect families to organizations that provide food, health resources, and crisis interventions. When possible DJS is also assisting in promoting remote programming with community-based service providers. DJS is providing updates to the court regarding a youth's adjustment to community supervision as necessary, including compliance with court ordered conditions and GPS supervision.

If your child is being supervised in the community by the DJS Community Detention Unit, community detention officers also are able to connect families to crisis intervention resources and other resources such as care packages and food to support family and youth needs.

How can I communicate with my child if visitation is not allowed?

Due to an increase in Covid-19 cases around the State of Maryland, the Department has suspended all family face to face visits at this time. In an effort to continue to keep youth connected with family, we will be increasing the number of youth phone calls allowed daily and will be increasing the use of virtual visitation. This change is being made to protect the safety of all youth, staff and family members. As with family visitation, DJS supports access to counsel through video and telephone calls. In-person visitation will also be made available when necessary.

Will my child continue to receive health care in DJS facilities? What if he/she has an underlying issue or pre-existing condition?

Yes. DJS recognizes that it is essential during this health crisis to ensure youth have access to necessary and supportive health care services. The DJS medical team has identified all youth that have underlying conditions that may place the youth at a higher risk for complications due to the COVID-19. Youth with these conditions are carefully monitored for symptoms and their cases are reviewed frequently to ensure proper care is provided to address the underlying condition.

DJS is able to test youth who are displaying symptoms or may have been exposed to an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19, and it has been obtaining results within 2-3 days. Should a youth contract the virus, DJS is prepared to treat the youth and implement measures to prevent the spread of the disease to others.

Will my child be tested for COVID-19?

COVID-19 tests are administered (1) when a young person is admitted to a DJS detention facility; (2) prior to removal from the routine admission quarantine space; (3) prior to transfer to another facility; (4) after possible exposure to a COVID-19 positive individual; (5) if the youth displays any symptoms consistent with COVID-19, or; (6) as otherwise directed by the DJS medical team. Youth who have been exposed or who have tested positive are moved into quarantine or medical isolation. This routine testing protocol is in addition to universal testing.

Has universal testing been implemented?

Governor Hogan directed DJS to begin universal COVID-19 testing on all youth and staff in DJS facilities. Since COVID-19 testing began, more than 2,000 tests have been administered to youth and staff in DJS facilities. Moving forward, the Maryland Department of Health will conduct the universal testing of the remaining DJS staff and youth and continue the universal testing in DJS facilities on an ongoing basis. As we have throughout the pandemic response, we will continue to evaluate the testing and mitigation strategies and adjust them as necessary in response to the virus.

Where can I access the testing data?

Data related to all COVID19 testing is posted and updated daily on the [DJS website](#).

Will my child continue to receive behavioral health support?

Yes. DJS behavioral health staff are essential facility employees and continue to report to the facility and provide services and interventions to youth. Additionally, DJS utilizes tele-psychiatry and other tele-medicine resources to support our youth and promote a continuity of care. If youth are released from a facility every effort is made to provide community-based services and access to at least a 30- day supply of medication.

Is my child receiving education services?

Education services are provided by the Maryland State Department of Education through its Juvenile Services Education System (JSES), which provides the curriculum, the teachers and support staff for all DJS schools. DJS and MSDE have worked together ensure a continuity of education services either through implementing a distance learning model, or through classroom instruction. Youth attend classes in small groups to adhere to social distancing guidelines.

Besides education, what does my child do all day?

DJS has continued to implement facility-based programming to provide a pro-social outlet to youth while they are placed in DJS detention and committed programs. All programming is designed to comply with social distancing practices and to limit non-essential physical contact.

What about visits from legal counsel?

DJS supports access to counsel through video and telephone calls. In-person visitation will also be made available when necessary.

DJS Facility Health & Safety Information**What processes are in place to ensure my child's safety?**

DJS has implemented numerous measures, in adherence to CDC and MDH guidance, to prevent the spread of COVID19 and protect the health and safety of the youth and staff. Those measures include the following:

Increased Hygiene - Additional hand sanitizer stations were installed in all facilities and access to sanitizer is made available to youth and staff. Hand sanitizer is placed in the dining areas, housing units, classrooms, programming space and other locations where a sink and soap is not readily accessible. The sanitizer provided to staff and youth is alcohol-based and CDC approved.

Youth and staff have been provided information regarding the importance of handwashing and proper hygiene. Youth have been provided with extra soap and frequent opportunities to access handwashing stations.

Facility staff, including behavioral health staff, have worked with youth to provide updates regarding the impact of COVID-19 on our communities and facility operations, and provide frequent communications regarding ways to contribute to risk reductions, such as social distancing, wearing a mask at all times, practicing good cough etiquette, frequent hand washing, avoiding touching one's eyes, nose, or mouth, safe practices during meal time, and limiting non-essential physical contact.

Increased Sanitation and Cleaning - All facilities increased the frequency of deep-cleaning of all spaces within the facility, including all restrooms, housing units, dining areas and programming space. CDC-approved disinfectants are used by the cleaning and sanitation crews. All DJS facilities are cleaned once a day, 5 days a week by an outside vendor. The Department has also contracted with an infectious disease cleaning vendor to provide sanitation cleanings, as needed.

Screening All Who Enter DJS Facilities - DJS has directed that all staff undergo a touchless temperature screening prior to entering the facility. Additionally, staff must respond verbally to a questionnaire screening for exposure to, diagnosis of, or symptoms of COVID-19. If a staff member has an elevated temperature or answers affirmatively to possible exposure or a diagnosis of COVID-19 on the questionnaire, the staff person is restricted from entering the facility and directed to contact their primary care physician.

Practicing Social Distancing - DJS has educated staff and youth alike on the necessity of social distancing, which includes information about creating appropriate physical space between each other, maintaining small groups, and modifying programming to limit physical contact. DJS has limited groups to no more than 10, maintained individual rooms whenever possible, and adjusted schedules to minimize contact between groups of youth.

Public Visitation - Due to an increase in Covid-19 cases around the State of Maryland, the Department has suspended all family face to face visits at this time. In an effort to continue to keep youth connected with family, we will be increasing the number of youth phone calls allowed daily and will be increasing the use of virtual visitation. This change is being made to protect the safety of all youth, staff and family members.

Limited Non-Essential Transfers and Transports - DJS has limited transports to court and outside appointments to only those that are essential. DJS provides access to video and telephone calls to permit youth to participate remote court hearings.

Created Intake Admission Units in Detention Facilities - All youth admitted to detention facilities are tested for COVID-19 and screened for symptoms consistent with those known to be indicative of COVID-19. All youth received into detention are monitored for symptom development for a 14-day period. Youth specifically admitted to BCJJC, Cheltenham, Hickey and Waxter are automatically placed in an intake admission unit for a period up to 14 days.

Committed Facility Accommodations: Group Living Strategies - Two of the DJS-operated committed residential programs (Backbone and Green Ridge Youth Centers) accommodate youth in a dorm-style setting. Consistent with CDC and MDH guidance, DJS has put into place measures that will significantly reduce the number of youth in each unit and to ensure dedicated hygiene facilities for each unit, including shower and restroom facilities.

Implemented the Use of Personal Protection Equipment ("PPE") and Masks - All DJS staff and youth have been provided masks, and are required to wear them at all times. DJS has made available to staff and medical providers all additional and necessary PPE, including gowns, gloves,

face shields, and sanitizer. DJS is working closely with MDH and the Governor's Administration to restock PPE as needed.

Developed Plans and Protocols to Respond to a Positive COVID-19 Test - Space/units have been identified to allow for appropriate and safe isolation if a youth is displaying symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19. These units are designed to allow for a certain level of programming to continue, but to ensure youth's medical needs are being met and to limit facility-wide exposure.

What happens when a staff member or a youth test positive for COVID-19?

DJS has developed protocols to address when either a staff member or a youth test positive for COVID-19. Specifically, if there is a suspected or confirmed youth exposure, DJS provides proper medical care and implements steps to mitigate the spread of the virus to others in the facility. Those steps include placing the youth in medical isolation, providing PPE to the youth and staff caring for the youth, ensuring access to hygiene items, providing items helpful to address a youth's symptoms, requiring appropriate signage and medical documentation, and requiring frequent wellness checks and medical interventions. DJS also identified activities and materials that can be provided to youth while recovering from the virus, and it will ensure frequent youth and medical team contact with the appropriate family/community support system.

When there has been a suspected or confirmed facility staff exposure, DJS worked with the staff member and the local health department to gather information regarding potential exposure in the facility. Staff who display symptoms are not permitted to enter the facility or are directed to leave the facility if developed while on their shift. Staff that have tested positive are directed not to return to work until the need for medical isolation is over as recommended by the CDC.

How does the contact tracing process work?

In the event that a youth or staff test positive for the COVID-19 virus, personnel from the DJS Office of the Inspector General (OIG) have been trained to conduct contact tracing to quickly determine if other individuals in the facility may have come into contact and been possibly exposed to the virus through interactions with the positive youth or staff. A total of 26 OIG personnel have been trained as contact tracers. This procedure involves interviewing the positive staff or youth and reviewing facility video footage to determine with whom the positive youth or staff interacted. If an individual is identified as having been exposed to the COVID-19 positive staff or youth, the OIG personnel forward the names of those individuals to DJS Health Services, Behavioral Health Services and facility administrators to make the appropriate notifications. Throughout this process, DJS staff adhere to State and Federal confidentiality laws regarding medical and personal information. Individuals who may have been potentially exposed are directed to quarantine at home (staff) or placed on a quarantine unit (youth).

Who ensures that all the new plans and protocols are followed?

DJS has a robust quality assurance process in-place, and DJS monitors have visited facilities and continually review facility video footage to audit implementation of the preventative and safety measures.

What has DJS done to prepare staff for this growing crisis?

DJS recognizes that the health emergency may result in many facility-based staff staying home because they have a suspected or confirmed COVID19 exposure. To account for this, DJS has trained 160 community-based staff to fill facility posts if the need arises.

What about staff who are in a vulnerable or high-risk category for COVID-19?

DJS has also worked with staff to identify those who are at higher risk of severe illness with COVID-19, and it has revised such staff's duties to reduce the likelihood of their exposure.

DJS Community-Based Services Information**My child is on probation in the community. Is DJS continuing to supervise support my child in the community?**

Yes. DJS continues to supervise and support youth and families in the community. For youth on probation, the majority of contacts between youth, families and their case managers are accomplished through video and telephones calls.

In each county, DJS has identified at least one staff member to gather community based resources and supports to connect families to organizations that provide food, health resources, and crisis interventions.

Is DJS Community Detention still operating?

Yes. DJS has continued to operate community detention supervision 24 hours a day/7 days a week. The majority of supervision is done through electronic monitoring and through telephone and video contacts with the youth and family. DJS community detention officers ("CDOs") are in the community to check on youth and families when telephone contact is not possible, when tampering with the electronic monitoring equipment is indicated, or when necessary to respond to an urgent need. CDOs have access to PPE and are instructed to practice social distancing strategies. CDOs also are able to connect families to crisis intervention resources and other resources, such as care packages and food to support family and youth needs.

Will a community detention officer contact me or my child in person?

DJS is continuing to support youth and families that are court-ordered to a period of community-based supervision. The majority of contacts between youth, families and their case managers are accomplished through video and telephones calls. If an emergent need arises or an in-person response is required, case managers are able to rely on CDOs to make required community-based contacts. In each county, DJS has identified at least one staff member to gather community-bases resources and supports to connect families to organizations that provide food, health resources, and crisis interventions. Whenever possible, DJS is also assisting in promoting remote programming with community-based service providers. DJS continues to provide updates to the courts regarding a youth's adjustment to community supervision as necessary, including compliance with court ordered conditions and GPS supervision.

What precautions are community detention officers taking?

CDOs have access to PPE and are instructed to practice social distancing strategies.