



# Office of Children and Family Services

ANDREW M. CUOMO  
Governor

SHEILA J. POOLE  
Commissioner

## Memo

**To:** Associate Commissioners, Facility Managers, Facility Directors and Assistant Directors

**From:** Felicia A. B. Reid, Esq., *Acting Deputy Commissioner*  
Dr. Joseph E. Tomassone, *Acting Associate Commissioner*  
Dr. James Horne, *Chief of Medical Services*

**Date:** October 9, 2020

**Re:** COVID-19, Youth in Residential Care, and Face Coverings/Masks

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(**Note:** For support, this guidance contains several footnoted resources for facility use.)

As you are all aware, the fight against COVID-19 continues across New York State and the nation. DJJOY prioritizes the well-being of youth in our care and of staff who show up every day in support of the youth and each other. In the last seven months, DJJOY has worked to be responsive to COVID-19's many shifts. Through guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the New York State Department of Health, we all know that wearing a face covering or mask, and accompanying behavior changes (e.g., social distancing where possible, increased cleaning and disinfecting, and hand washing/sanitizing) have been effective in slowing the spread of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

### Youth and Face Coverings/Masks

**Effective immediately**, facilities should provide face coverings/masks to youth when they are unable or unlikely to maintain 6 feet of social distance from others (e.g., staff, visitors, other youth), and when they are engaging in facility-wide activities or events.<sup>2</sup> Also, if youth are intentionally or effectively cohorted, they should wear a mask when programming with any other cohort.<sup>3</sup>

### Exclusions and Exceptions

Youth who should not wear a face covering/mask due to a medical or mental health condition, or who are unable to remove a face covering/mask without assistance are excluded from this guidance.

There are instances when youth need not wear a mask due to the particular activity; these include, but are not limited to:

- While eating, drinking, or taking oral medication;
- While receiving dental treatment;

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<sup>1</sup> See *COVID-19 Safety: Face Mask Covering Expectations and PPE for Staff* (April 16, 2020, reissued July 14, 2020); *Required Temperature Checks* (June 4, 2020); and *Guidelines for the Use of Personal Protective Equipment/Quarantine and Isolation Protocol* (July 18, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> See *Resuming Visitation at OCFS Facilities* and related documents (July 21, 2020; reaffirmed at the DJJOY COVID call of July 31, 2020). For facilities that, as of the date of this memo, have suspended visitation, the *Resuming Visitation* memo and related documents are superseded by their respective visit suspension memos.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, under no circumstance should youth who are under quarantine/isolation protocol be programming with youth who are not.

- During hygiene;
- While sleeping;
- When indoors or outdoors and able or likely to maintain at least 6 feet of social distance from others.

## Implementation

Facilities should encourage youth to wear their face covering/mask consistently. Facilities are free to initiate programming to teach youth about the purpose of face covering/masks and how to properly wear, care for,<sup>4</sup> and dispose of a face covering/mask.<sup>5</sup>

Face coverings/masks for youth can be:

- Supplied out of current facility stock of surgical or cloth masks (wires must be removed) as coordinated with the Bureau of Management and Program Support;
- Purchased directly from vendors and coordinated with the Bureau of Management and Program Support and OCFS' Safety and Health Director;
- Supplied from donations (local community or staff); and/or
- Made by youth through programming that teaches youth how to craft<sup>6</sup> and care for/wash their own no-sew face covering(s).

Donated or crafted face coverings/masks must be inspected for contraband by the facility and be free from inappropriate imagery, markings, gang signs, and/or vulgarity. Staff should take measures to ensure that a youth is not using a donated or crafted mask to signify or represent any gang. Any face coverings/masks that are donated or crafted by youth cannot be gaiters.

**In no instance** should a youth face a disciplinary consequence or change in programming for failure to consistently wear a face covering/mask. If a youth is not consistent in wearing their face covering/mask, staff should work to counsel a youth to wear it within the frame of working to care for themselves and others and create a safe environment for all. Staff can determine whether a youth may participate in a program activity when wearing one is appropriate under the concerns of this guidance.

## Communication

Facility Directors should communicate this shift in practice through local communication. If there are any questions about this memorandum, facilities should contact their Facility Manager. For questions regarding youth and COVID-19, facilities may contact BHS via the Q&A Mailbox for Facility Questions Related to Youth per that protocol.<sup>7</sup>

Thank you for your work to keep our DJJOY community safe.

### CC:

C. Hernandez	M. Carli	K. Sena
F. Mallick	T. Boniface	N. Steinbock-Pratt
R. MacGiffert	M. Wilson	N. Aledort (obo Office of the Ombudsman)
T. Bromirski	J. Greening	

<sup>4</sup> See *How to Wash a Cloth Mask*: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-wash-cloth-face-coverings.html>.

<sup>5</sup> See *How to Put on, Use, Take Off, and Dispose of a Single-Use Mask*: [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/epi-win/how-to-use-mask-v0-1-print.pdf?sfvrsn=64ba1493\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/epi-win/how-to-use-mask-v0-1-print.pdf?sfvrsn=64ba1493_2).

<sup>6</sup> See *6 DIY No-Sew Face Masks You Can Make RN*: <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/lifestyle/a32380306/diy-no-sew-face-masks/>; *5 Ways to Make a No-Sew Face Mask with Household Materials*: <https://sarahmaker.com/how-to-make-a-no-sew-face-mask-with-at-home-materials/>.

<sup>7</sup> See *BHS COVID-19 Q&A Mailbox for Facility Questions Related to Youth* (August 31, 2020).