

**COUNTY OF**



**ALLEGHENY**

**RICH FITZGERALD**  
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**Allegheny County Infant/Toddler Early Intervention  
In-Person Services Plan and Guidance**

*September 8, 2020*

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The Allegheny County Early Intervention (EI) program is committed to implementing recommended federal, state and local guidance to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 among Early Intervention professionals, families, and communities as in-person services resume. The *Allegheny County Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Health and Safety Plan* and the *Allegheny County Guidance for Conducting In-Person Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services* were developed to inform EI program providers and participants of the strategies that will be implemented to achieve this goal. Because in-person EI services are provided in people's homes and communities, successful implementation of this plan relies heavily upon the team effort of EI professionals and families to follow the health and safety guidelines detailed in these documents. As such, it may not be in people's best interest to participate in in-person services if an EI professional or an EI family household member is unable or unwilling to observe measures outlined in this plan. However, regardless of the practice modality, EI program staff will work with families to offer quality EI services in the safest manner feasible.

The *Allegheny County Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Health and Safety Plan* and the *Allegheny County Guidance for Conducting In-Person Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services* will be posted on the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (ACDHS) website, The Alliance for Infants and Toddlers' (The Alliance) website and Facebook page, and will also be distributed to recipients of the Alliance's e-news newsletter. Early Intervention providers are also encouraged to share these documents on their websites.

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## **Allegheny County Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Health and Safety Plan for Resuming In-Person Services**

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In addition to this plan, it is the expectation that all Allegheny County EI Providers and the EI SC Entity will follow the *Allegheny County Guidance for Conducting In-Person Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services* that outlines how and when EI in-person service provision will be carried out in Allegheny County during each of the operational phases outlined by the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL): Red, Yellow and Green.

### **The Early Intervention Pandemic Team**

The *Allegheny County Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Health and Safety Plan* and the *Allegheny County Guidance for Conducting In-Person Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services* were created by the Allegheny County Early Intervention program team in the Allegheny County Department of Humans Services (AC DHS) Office of Behavioral Health (OBH), in collaboration with stakeholder groups including, families who receive EI services, EI professionals, leaders from EI contracted providers, and the EI Service Coordination (SC) entity.

In June 2020, Allegheny County formed an Early Intervention (EI) Pandemic Team that is charged with implementing and monitoring the COVID-19 *Allegheny County Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Health and Safety Plan* and the *Allegheny County Guidance for Conducting In-Person Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services*. The team is comprised of the following members, including 2 Co-Coordinators from the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health (ACDHS OBH), and one representative from each EI provider and the SC entity in Allegheny County:

- ACDHS OBH - Tammy Lopreiato, Program Manager, Bureau of Child and Adolescent Services; Co-Coordinator
- ACDHS OBH - Tara Korn, Early Intervention Coordinator; Co-Coordinator
- The Alliance for Infants and Toddlers – Susan Levi, Executive Director
- ACHIEVA – Sharon Richards, Vice President of Early Intervention
- Early Intervention Specialists (EIS) – Anne Shubak, Executive Director Western Region
- The Integrated Care Corporation (ICC) – Lance Queer, President
- Pediatric Therapy Professionals, Inc. (PTP) – Gina Bautti, President
- TEIS Early Intervention – Maureen Poulliott, Director
- The Early Learning Institute (TELI) – Nichole Merz, Early Intervention Coordinator

The *Allegheny County Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Health and Safety Plan* was informed by existing best practice guidance from numerous sources including: the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Governor Wolf’s office, and local Allegheny County government officials.

## **The Allegheny County Infant/Toddler EI Health and Safety Plan**

The *Allegheny County Infant/Toddler EI Health and Safety Plan* will be implemented in conjunction with the *Allegheny County Guidance for Conducting In-Person Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services* (located below) to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and to help protect the safety and well-being of EI professionals, family members and the general public. The process of resuming in-person services will be a gradual transition, and there may be steps forward and backward depending on health trends and outbreaks. Recommended considerations may also evolve over time, and this plan may be revised as needed.

The EI Health and Safety Plan addresses the following core competency areas that must be followed by EI providers, staff and participants: A. Training and Education, B. Health Screening and Response, C. Conducting In-Person EI Visits, and D. EI Therapist and Provider Caseload and Staffing Review. Because much of the detailed guidance referenced in the plan from the CDC and PA DOH may change over time, EI Providers and the EI SC Entity are encouraged to regularly check for updates from those entities so that education, training and in-person service delivery implementation can be adjusted accordingly.

### **A. Training and Education**

This section provides guidance on the training and education protocols EI providers and the SC Entity must provide to staff and families who receive EI services and supports.

**A.1 Staff COVID-19 Training:** Prior to resuming in-person services, each EI provider and the SC Entity is required to train all staff on the following plans and protocols that address how to carry out proper service implementation during COVID-19:

- *The Allegheny County Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Health and Safety Plan;*
- *The Allegheny County Guidance for Conducting In-Person Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services;* and
- [CDC](#) and [PA DOH](#) health and safety protocols that address proper masking and hygiene, and understanding COVID-19 symptoms and how the virus spreads.

**A.2 Staff Education About Proper Use of Face Coverings:** Each contracted provider and SC Entity will provide EI professionals with information and resources about acceptable face coverings and when and how to properly use masks and face shields per CDC, PA DOH, OCDEL, and Pennsylvania's business guidance guidelines.

**A.3 Maintaining Staff COVID-19 Training Documentation:** Each EI provider and SC Entity will maintain corresponding training documentation and will have this documentation available for review upon request by ACDHS, OBH.

**A.4 COVID-19 Education and Resources for EI Family Members:** Prior to resuming in-person services, EI Service Coordinators are required to share and discuss educational resources and protocols regarding COVID-19 with families who receive EI services. Following current Allegheny County, CDC and PA DOH guidance, plans and protocols, this information must include:

- Service delivery options including tele-intervention services, in-person services, or a hybrid of the two, including guidelines within which Allegheny County can provide in-person EI services;
- Alternative therapist options if a currently assigned therapist is not able to provide in-person services;
- Parental rights to request a new provider;
- Preparations needed before an in-person visit including proper sanitation of surfaces;
- What to expect in an in-person visit including proper handwashing hygiene, social distancing, face covering requirements, limiting non-essential visitors, and safety protocols that EI professionals will practice; and
- Understanding COVID-19 symptoms and how the virus spreads.

**A.5 Education for EI Family Members About Proper Use of Face Coverings:** EI Professionals/Service Coordinators will share information and resources with caregivers about acceptable face coverings and when and how to properly use masks and face shields during in-person service delivery per the CDC and PA DOH guidelines.

## **B. Health Screening and Response**

This section provides guidance on the COVID-19 health screening protocols that EI providers and the SC Entity must implement with staff and families who receive EI services and supports. It also discusses action steps staff should take when screening results indicate possible illness or exposure to COVID-19, including reporting to officials for contact tracing.

**B.1 COVID-19 Daily Health Screening Protocol:** EI providers and the SC Entity are required to develop an agency-specific Daily Health Screening and Response protocol. This protocol must stipulate the following:

**B.1a** Prior to providing in-home services each day, employees and contracted personnel will take their temperature and answer the following health screening questions developed by OCDEL:

- OCDEL Health Screening Questions:

1. Has anyone in the home tested positive or is anyone in the home suspected of having COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
  2. Does anyone in the home have signs or symptoms of a fever, new or worsening cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, respiratory illness, headache, fatigue, aches and pains, diarrhea/nausea, or a runny nose?
  3. Has anyone in the home had contact within the last 14 days with someone with or under investigation for COVID-19?
- OCDEL Additional Considerations:
    4. Will a person with a weakened immune system, a person who is pregnant or over the age of 65 years, or a person that has chronic health conditions (e.g. heart disease, lung disease, diabetes), or other factors that pose a risk if the person becomes infected with COVID-19 be present during the visit? If yes, do you still want to participate in in-person services?
    5. Has anyone who will be present during the visit traveled outside of Pennsylvania in the past 14 days?

**B.1b** If an EI professional believes they are at risk of transmitting COVID-19, or the response is yes to any of the three health screening questions above (see B.1a), it is recommended that the provider of EI services coordinate with the family to participate in a tele-intervention session instead of an in-person session. If the response is yes to the two additional considerations, it is recommended that the EI professional and family discuss the possible risk in delivering an in-person session and document the decision. Tele-intervention will be an option for service delivery. If the EI professional answers no to all of the health screening questions, and the provider and caregiver agree that an in-person service visit is in the best interest of the child and family, the EI professional may then schedule an in-person service appointment, following all guidance outlined in the *Allegheny County Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Health and Safety Plan* and the *Allegheny County Guidance for Conducting In-Person Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services*.

**B.1c** EI professionals with COVID-19 symptoms or a temperature of 100.4 F or higher may not provide in-person services until at least 72 hours have passed since recovery and at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared. Per PA DOH guidelines, recovery is defined as: resolution of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath).

- B.1d** EI professionals are required to follow current CDC and PA DOH guidelines for quarantine and/or testing following any exposure or presumed exposure to COVID-19. Per PA DOH guidelines, EI professionals will not be permitted to provide in-person services until 14 days after exposure/presumed exposure to COVID-19, regardless of a negative test result. Furthermore, if the exposure involved a household member, the timeframe for quarantine is 14 days after the initial positive case has been released from isolation
- B.1e** EI professionals who have tested positive for COVID-19 are required to consult with a healthcare provider, state and/or local health departments, and their employer / contractor prior to resuming in-person services.
- B.1f** EI professionals are required to review the OCDEL Health Screening Questions (see B.1a) with families they work with prior to an in-person visit. Per PA DOH guidance, if any member of the household answers yes to any of the screening questions, EI professionals will not provide in-person services until 14 days after the household member's exposure, even if test results are negative. If an EI professional is unable to contact the family to ask the health screening questions before a scheduled in-person visit, and decides to proceed, they must ask the health screening questions before entering the home while wearing the appropriate face covering and maintaining at least a 6-foot distance from the doorway and the caregiver.
- B.1g** EI providers and the SC Entity will maintain documentation indicating daily temperature and health screen results for each staff and will have this documentation available for review upon request by ACDHS OBH.
- B.1h** EI professionals must maintain documentation of family member answers to the OCDEL Health Screening Questions (see B.1a). EI Service Providers and the SC Entity will have this documentation available for review upon request by ACDHS, OBH.
- B.2 COVID-19 Reporting Protocol:** EI providers and the SC Entity are required to develop an agency-specific COVID-19 Reporting protocol. This protocol must stipulate the following:
  - B.2a** If an EI professional tests positive for COVID-19, the EI provider or SC Entity must notify the Allegheny County EI Coordinator and complete a formal incident report.
  - B.2b** If a member of a household who receives EI services tests positive for COVID-19, the EI provider or SC Entity must notify the Allegheny County EI Coordinator and complete a formal incident report.
  - B.2c** EI professionals must communicate with their employer(s) or contracted agency(s) regarding any known or suspected personal risk of transmitting

COVID-19 and any personal risk of complications if they were to be infected.

**B.3 Communication Regarding Travel or Attendance at Large Crowd Events:** EI providers and the SC Entity are encouraged to monitor staff and EI family travel and attendance at events where there are large crowds as follows:

**B.3a** To help protect everyone’s safety, EI professionals and families are encouraged to communicate with each other regarding travel or participation in events involving large crowds. Family members and the EI professionals, as a team, will decide how to proceed regarding in-person services should travel or events occur.

**B.3b** In the event that an EI professional provides services in multiple counties, or lives in another county but provides services in Allegheny County, the ability to provide in-person services will be determined based on the guidance of state and/or local authorities, including the possible issuance of travel bans, and the *Allegheny County Guidance for Conducting In-Person Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services*. Additionally, the caregiver and the EI professional(s), as a team, may discuss the risks and benefits to determine how to proceed.

### **C. Conducting In-Person Visits**

This section provides guidance on the protocols EI providers and the SC Entity must follow when preparing for and conducting in-person EI visits with EI family members.

**C.1 Resuming In-Person Service Delivery:** In-person services may be provided when the following conditions are met:

- In-person delivery resumption occurs in accordance with guidelines outlined in the *Allegheny County Guidance for Conducting In-Person Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services*;
- Families agree to accept in-person services; and
- All parties meeting in-person agree to follow CDC, PA DOH, OCDEL and Pennsylvania’s business guidance guidelines pertaining to health and safety and proper hygiene prior to each in-person visit. This includes all parties agreeing to answer the OCDEL Screening Questions and Additional Considerations (see B.1a), to wear an appropriate face covering (see C.2) and to wash hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.

Families who decline screening and/or will not wear face coverings will be offered tele-intervention strategies to implement the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)/Individualized Education Plan (IEP) as an alternative to in-person strategies.

- C.1a** Prior to entering a home to provide in-person services, EI professionals will wash their hands with soap and water or will use hand sanitizer in accordance with CDC and PA DOH best practice guidelines. EI professionals will also strongly encourage household members to engage in these safety practices. EI professionals are required to supply their own soap, hand sanitizer and paper towels so the resources of the EI family are not impacted.
- C.1b** Per OCDEL guidance, EI professionals will document the caregiver's responses to the OCDEL screening on a form or within the session note.
- C.1c** When feasible, EI professionals will attempt to provide in-person services while social distancing outdoors if the caregiver is agreeable. When outdoor sessions are not an option, EI professionals and caregivers will discuss the best options for social distancing indoors that will allow for 6 feet of separation between household members and EI professionals to the extent feasible.
- C.1d** EI professionals must ask families receiving EI services to limit non-essential visitors during in-person sessions to the extent feasible, to maintain social-distancing protocols, and to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 by following hygiene and face covering guidelines (see C.2c). Please remember that face coverings are not a substitute for social distancing.
- C.1e** If an EI professional needs to touch a child or a caregiver, they will first wash their hands and then put on disposable gloves. The EI professional will safely remove and dispose of their gloves after use and will again wash their hands.
- C.1f** EI professionals will minimize physical contact with frequently touched surfaces in the home of the in-person service delivery. If an EI professional contacts a frequently touched surface, they will wash their hands.
- C.1g** If conditions exist in which there is potential for an EI professional to be splashed or sprayed by bodily fluids during their visit, the EI professional and caregiver should discuss whether it is the appropriate time to participate in in-person services. If the EI professional and caregiver agree to move forward with in-person services, the EI professional will utilize standard precautions, including the use of Personal Protective



Equipment (PPE), including a facemask, eye protection, disposable gloves, and a gown.

**C.1h** EI providers will communicate and coordinate directly with childcare facilities to determine each facility's protocol and ability to accommodate virtual or in-person services on-site. EI providers do not need to screen the children and adults in the childcare facility. The COVID health screening completed by the childcare program for the adults and children in the facility can be used to evaluate the safety to deliver EI services.

**C.1i** EI providers will fulfill additional responsibilities as described in Governor Tom Wolf's [Guidance for Businesses Permitted to Operate During the COVID-19 Disaster Emergency to Ensure the Safety and Health of Employees and the Public.](#)

**C.2 Use of Face Coverings During In-Person Service Delivery:** EI professionals are required wear an acceptable face covering (See A.2) during in-person service delivery, except when isolated from others in a private space or when it adversely affects their health.

**C.2a** EI Providers and the SC Entity do not need to purchase masks from any specific vendor but are required to provide masks to employees to wear during business hours.

**C.2b** EI Providers and the SC Entity may approve masks obtained or made by employees according to PA DOH guidelines (See A.2).

**C.2c** EI professionals will communicate the requirement that all household members present home at the time of in-person service delivery must wear an appropriate face covering per PA DOH guidelines (See A.2).

Exceptions to this requirement are as follows:

- Face coverings are not recommended for children under age 2 or for anyone who has difficulty breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the covering without assistance.
- Any child over the age of 2 or any adult (not including Early Intervention personnel) who cannot wear a mask due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition, or disability is encouraged to wear a full-face shield. Additionally, social distancing between non-household members must be in place for the duration of the in person Early Intervention service.

## **D. EI Intervention Therapist and Provider Caseload and Staffing Review**

This section provides guidance on the protocols EI providers and the SC Entity must follow when reviewing caseloads and staff accompaniment to determine if service delivery should be offered in-person or in a tele-intervention service modality.

### **D.1 Identifying Children Who Do Not Receive EI Tele-Intervention Services:**

Because the circumstances pertaining to COVID-19 service delivery may change over time, EI Therapists and Providers should regularly review their caseloads to identify children who are not receiving tele-intervention services and communicate that information to the SC according to the following criteria:

**D.1a** EI Therapists and Providers should identify and maintain a list of children who are not receiving tele-intervention services and those for whom tele-intervention alone is not effective.

**D.1b** EI Therapists and Providers should regularly provide the list of children who meet the criteria outlined in D.1a above to EI Service Coordinators.

### **D.2 Identifying EI Therapists Who Cannot Provide In-Home Services: EI**

Providers should compile a list of therapists who are not currently able to provide in-person services. The Provider should also plan for the ability to offer a replacement for any therapist who currently is unable to provide in-person services.

## **Allegheny County Guidance for Conducting In-Person Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services during COVID-19**

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This document was developed by the Allegheny County Infant/Toddler Early Intervention (EI) program, in collaboration with stakeholders to provide guidance to EI Providers and the EI Service Coordination (SC) Entity on when and how EI in-person service delivery will occur during the three phases of operation (Red, Yellow and Green) outlined by the Pennsylvania [Office of Child Development and Early Learning \(OCDEL\)](#). The three-phase matrix will be used to determine when in-person EI services may be provided to eligible children and their caregivers.

In addition to this guidance, it is the expectation that all Allegheny County EI Providers and the EI SC Entity will follow the *Allegheny County Infant/Toddler EI Health and Safety Plan*, that includes federal, state and local guidelines regarding training, health screening, hygiene and sanitation practices that must be followed during in-person service delivery **in all phases outlined below**. EI professionals and provider agencies are also responsible for adhering to the most current [CDC](#) and [PA DOH](#) guidelines and PA DHS [Guidance for Businesses Permitted to Operate During the COVID-19 Disaster Emergency to Ensure the Safety and Health of Employees and the Public](#) regarding COVID-19 symptoms, health and safety, hygiene protocol and business operations.

### **Red Phase**

#### **A. Allegheny County In-Person EI Service Provision During the Red Phase**

In accordance with OCDEL guidance, Allegheny County in-person EI services in the Red Phase will be limited, and the use of teleintervention will be encouraged. Initial and Annual (Re)-evaluations will be provided virtually.

#### **B. Exceptions to Teleintervention During the Red Phase**

If in-person services are necessary during the Red Phase, the following must occur:

- A request to provide in-person services must be provided to and reviewed by the EI provider's internal pandemic coordinator or team;
- Once approved, the EI provider's internal pandemic coordinator or team will notify the Allegheny County Pandemic Team Co-Coordinators prior to the in-person service date. This notification must include the following information:
  - Child's name
  - Justification for why in-person services are necessary
  - Name(s) of staff who will conduct the in-person services
  - Role(s) of staff who will conduct the in-person services (example: Service Coordinator, Independent Assessor, Therapist, etc.)

- Health and safety precautions that participants in the in-person services will practice

## Yellow Phase

### **A. Allegheny County In-Person EI Service Provision During the Yellow Phase**

In accordance with OCDEL guidance, Allegheny County encourages in-person EI services to be delivered via tele-intervention in the Yellow Phase, including evaluations.

In the Yellow Phase, EI in-person services may be provided in the following situations:

- a. In-person assessments/evaluations may be completed if the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team determines that they cannot be completed effectively in a remote format. If the service is for an initial evaluation, the evaluation team will determine if it cannot be completed effectively in a remote format.
- b. In-person services may be provided if the IFSP team determines that one or more of the following situations exist:
  - i. Tele-intervention alone is not an effective methodology for delivering specific EI services;
  - ii. The caregiver does not have access to the type of technology needed for services to be delivered through tele-intervention; or
  - iii. The caregiver has not otherwise accepted tele-intervention services.

If the IFSP team determines that in-person EI services may be offered in accordance with the guidance noted above, EI Service Coordinators may begin contacting families to gauge their interest in in-person services and may implement the education and health screening protocols outlined in the *Allegheny County Infant/Toddler EI Health and Safety Plan*. If a caregiver chooses in-person EI services, the EI Service Coordinator will communicate with the appropriate therapist/provider so that in-person services may resume.

## Green Phase

### **A. Allegheny County In-Person EI Service Provision During the Green Phase**

In accordance with OCDEL guidance, tele-intervention will continue to be the preferred method for the delivery of EI services and conducting evaluations and assessments in the Green Phase. In-person services and evaluations will be offered on a larger scale when there is minimal concern for the spread of COVID-19 in the area, per guidance by state and local officials.

As in the Yellow Phase, if the IFSP team determines that in-person EI services may be offered in accordance with the guidance noted above, EI Service Coordinators may contact families to gauge their interest in in-person services and may implement the education and health screening protocols outlined in the *Allegheny County Infant/Toddler EI Health and Safety Plan*. If a caregiver chooses in-person EI services, the EI Service Coordinator will communicate with the appropriate therapist/provider so that in-person services may resume.

All EI service providers must follow CDC and PA DOH guidelines. The provider of the EI services should continue to contact the family prior to each home visit to ask health screening questions as described in the “Yellow Phase”

## **Resources**

The COVID-19 pandemic is a rapidly evolving situation. It is important for EI programs and EI providers to continually check the resources listed below for any new guidance or additional information:

- [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#)
- [CDC Guidance for Return to Work for Healthcare Personnel](#)
- [PA DOH guidance for infection prevention and control](#)
- [CDC guidance on infection prevention and control recommendations for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 in healthcare settings](#)

### **CDC Resources Communities and Healthcare Providers**

- [Communities, Schools, Workplaces, and Events Information for Where You Live, Work, Learn, and Play](#)
- [Communications Resources](#)
- [Information for Healthcare Professionals about Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

### **Pregnant Women, Infants and Families**

- [If You Are Pregnant, Breastfeeding, or Caring for Young Children](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

### **General Prevention**

- [When and How to Wash Your Hands](#)
- [How to Protect Yourself & Others](#)
- [Household Checklist](#)

### **Families and Young Children**

- [Keep Children Healthy during the COVID-19 Outbreak](#)
- [Talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
- [Cleaning and Disinfection for Households](#)
- [Coping with Stress](#)

### **Social Service Providers**

- [Child Care, Schools, and Youth Programs](#)
- [Taking Care of your Behavioral Health \(SAMHSA\)](#)

## **Additional Resources**

- [CDC Self-Checker](#)
- [Resource for Translated Materials](#)
- [Communication Toolkit for Migrants, Refugees, and other Limited-English-Proficient Populations](#)
- A child's social-emotional needs might be impacted by COVID-19. Masks may lead to anxiety, fear and/or fewer opportunities for children to learn to read facial expressions. The [ECTA Center](#) has a variety of resources on their COVID-19 webpage.