

CIRCULAR

Date: September 22, 2020

CIRCULAR NUMBER: COVID#: 2020-10

To: CFS Authorities, Adoption Agencies, CYSD Staff

Subject: **Information Pertaining to COVID-19**

Program(s): Adoption/Post Adoption/Intercountry Practice - **UPDATE**

Type: Policy For Internal Reference Only
 Procedure Information Only

Effective Date Immediately

Topic: Update to Practice Guidelines

The attached updated practice guidelines for adoptions, post-adoption services and intercountry adoptions, are to clarify the Adoption Financial Assistance Process.

Previous communication and guidance for agency staff about adhering to new protocols respecting COVID-19 remain in place. Staff should continue to follow directions about limiting exposure and follow the service practice guidelines distributed.

The most up to date information on COVID-19 can be found at <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19>

Christina Moody
Acting Assistant Deputy Minister
Child and Youth Services Division

COVID-19 Adoption/ Post Adoption Practice Guidelines – Updated September 10, 2020

Purpose: Both CFS agencies and private adoption agencies complete adoption work. During COVID-19 this practice guideline allows for alternative service delivery, while ensuring the safety of families, organizations and program staff, based on public health information. All CFS agencies who support adoption work, including subsidy requests, are subject to these interim guidelines.

Adoption Regulation Requirements

All the requirements and time frames set out under the Adoption Regulation, including medical reports, child abuse registry, prior contact and criminal record checks, continue to apply in order for prospective adoptive families to be approved. This means adoption placements, except for relinquishing at birth, may be delayed until the COVID-19 public health directives regarding social distancing have been lifted.

Homestudy Assessments and Homestudy Updates

Until further notice, homestudy assessments may be completed through a face-to-face visit or via telephone or online. A minimum of one home visit must occur to complete a home safety inspection. Homestudy updates for families who have moved or renovated since the previous homestudy or update must also include one home visit to complete a home safety inspection. Please see the home visit guidelines below for further details.

Home Visits

Effective immediately, home visits for home inspection purposes to complete homestudy assessments or homestudy updates for clients who have moved to a new residence or renovated can occur.

Before going on a home visit, screen using the [COVID-19 Screening Tool](#).

If the visit takes place, practice good hand hygiene before and after the visit, maintain social distancing (two meters or six feet) whenever possible and minimize the number of people in attendance.

If social distancing cannot be maintained, all agency staff entering a private residence for a home inspection must wear personal protective equipment (PPE). Agency staff will have access to PPE. Ensure all procedures regarding donning and doffing PPE are followed.

When conducting a visit in an indoor location other than a private residence (e.g., agency office), agency staff must determine if social distancing cannot be maintained or if anyone in attendance is medically compromised. In these

situations, PPE must be worn (eye shield and mask). PPE is not required for agency staff when conducting outdoor visits.

Adoption Placement – Division 1 (Permanent Ward)

The Central Adoption Registry will now be providing referrals for permanent wards with approved adoptive applicants, including child-specific referrals. Please see the home visit guidelines above on how home visits can be conducted safely.

Adoption Placement – Division 2 (Private)

Completing these placements is considered essential, as birth parents are planning for their newborn infants to be adopted and the children are to be placed within 48 hours. Public health protocols must be followed for contact with birth parents and prospective adoptive parents in completing a Division 2 adoption placement. Please see the home visit guidelines above on how home visits can be conducted safely.

Adoption Placement – Division 3 (Intercountry)

All child proposals will continue to be processed. If the Manitoba Central Authority approves the child proposal, it will be forwarded to the appropriate adoption agency to share with prospective adoptive parents. Prospective adoptive parents will be required to have the child's medical information reviewed by a physician via telephone before accepting the child proposal. Please see the home visit guidelines above on how home visits can be conducted safely.

Intercountry adoption is considered family reunification and, therefore, is deemed "essential travel" and allowed to proceed. Anyone who returns from international or domestic travel must follow the public health protocols for self-isolation following their return.

Post Placement Reports: At this time, we have not received communications from States of origin as to whether they will accept post placement reports without face-to-face meetings. Agency staff may consider completing the post placement reports via a home visit, telephone and/or online interview. However, agency staff must document in the report if a face-to-face meeting was not conducted due to COVID-19. Ultimately, it will be the decision of the State of origin to determine if this approach is acceptable. Any updates from States of origin regarding acceptable post placement reporting will be communicated to the adoption field as soon as it is received. Please see the home visit guidelines above on how home visits can be conducted safely.

Adoption Placement – Division 4 (Defacto), Division 5 (Extended Family) and Division 6 (Parent's Own)

Division 4, 5 and 6 adoptions require a Report Upon Investigation, which may be completed via telephone and/or online. A home inspection visit is required. Please see

the home visit guidelines above on how home visits can be conducted safely. The Court of Queen's Bench is currently processing all uncontested adoption matters. However, contested adoptions remain on hold, pending direction from the Associate Chief Justice.

Education Seminars

Adoption Education Seminars can now be offered online or in-person, following the public health limits for public gatherings. If you offer online education, you must use an interactive educational format and evaluate the prospective adoptive parents' level of learning.

Adoption Financial Assistance

These requests are considered essential and will continue to be processed electronically via fax or email.

- **Ongoing Assistance** will be processed according to usual procedures.
- **Prescription requests / renewals** will continue to be processed according to usual procedures.
- **Therapy requests / renewals** will be approved or renewed with evidence the therapy is being provided via phone or electronically or in person. The therapist is required to email the child's case manager outlining how they will be providing service to the clients.
- **Dental requests** can be submitted and will be processed. In emergency situations, case managers should provide adoptive families' insurance coverage and the billing information via email to (Adoption@gov.mb.ca) for processing.
- **Psychological assessments** will be approved / renewed with evidence the service is being provided via phone or electronically or in person. The specialist is required to email to the child's social worker outlining how they will be providing service to the client.
- **Mileage / accommodation requests** will be processed according to usual procedures.

Post-Adoption Services

Please note that staff will continue to respond to clients in ways that reduce the reliance on face-to-face meetings to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Clients can contact Post-Adoption Services for assistance via the toll free telephone number 1-855-837-5542, or via the email address postadoption@gov.mb.ca. Walk in services will be provided during office hours, but all safety precautions including screening and social distancing will be followed. The requirement of a witness on all Post-Adoption Service forms has been waived until further notice. Clients can send in their forms with a copy of their identification by email or mail.