

To; DDS Providers
Regional Directors
Area Directors

From: Doreet Goldhaber
Director of Licensure and Certification

Date: May 1, 2020

Re: Guidelines and interpretation on use of evacuation/fire drills with participant simulation during the COVID-19 emergency

Attached are revised guidelines that have been in effect since 2004 concerning the use of evacuation/fire drills with participant simulation. The guidance has also been revised to allow this type of drill at the time of pre-placement to temporary residential sites being established during this COVID-19 emergency.

Evacuation philosophy and strategy has always held that it is safer to evacuate than to remain in the home, and the Provider is expected to use every possible strategy to ensure evacuation within 2 ½ minutes. Participant simulation is one method to ensure that staff are trained and knowledgeable in evacuation practices so that safe and timely evacuation can occur.

In almost all situations, fire drills will be conducted directly with the individuals, who must be provided whatever support necessary to accomplish the task of completing successful fire drills, regardless of their physical or other limitations. While this remains the standard, there may be a few unique situations in which direct participation in fire drills is unsafe or poses some risk to an individual. During this state of emergency, many individuals who are symptomatic, unhealthy or in some way impacted by the COVID-19 virus may not be able to actively participate in a fire drill. When a fire drill is simulated for a particular person, all other activities related to the implementation of fire drills, such as the specific staff conducting the fire drills, the time of the drills, and what transpires for the housemates for whom a simulation is not indicated, should remain as consistent as possible.

In the event of an actual emergency, all individuals and staff are expected to evacuate within 2 ½ minutes; these guidelines apply only to drills. When increasing capacity in an existing home, or when developing alternative sites, there needs to be an approved signed Safety Plan noting the number of staff needed to evacuate in 2 ½ minutes. Prior to issuance of the Approval to Occupy, the Provider must conduct a fire drill to demonstrate that all individuals can be evacuated within 2 ½ minutes. If the Provider cannot demonstrate evacuation within 2 ½ minutes, other measures will need to be taken. These other options include but are not limited to altering staffing patterns, and/or reviewing the placements. If there are any additional questions, feel free to contact the Regional QE Director for further information.

CC: Regional QE Directors