|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  *Executive Office of Health and Human Services*  *Department of Mental Health*  *25 Staniford Street*  *Boston, Massachusetts 02114-2575* | |  |
| **CHARLES D. BAKER**  ***Governor***  **KARYN E. POLITO**  ***Lieutenant Governor*** MARYLOU SUDDERS ***Secretary***  **BROOKE DOYLE**  Commissioner | | **(617) 626-8000**  **www.mass.gov/dmh** | |

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Parents / Legally Authorized Representatives (LAR) of Youth in Intensive Residential Treatment Programs (IRTPs) and the Clinically Intensive Residential Treatment Program (CIRT)

From: Brooke Doyle, Commissioner

Date: March 18, 2021

CC: IRTP & CIRT Program Directors

Re: Parent/LAR Visitation at IRTPs & the CIRT

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant restrictions to in-person contact for parents/LARs and youth in DMH’s IRTPs and the CIRT. We recognize that these restrictions created hardship and stress for both parents and youth, but they are necessary in order to protect the health and safety of all our youth, their families, as well as the staff and other patients and clients in facilities where the IRTPs/CIRT are located. It is important to remember that our IRTPs/CIRT are congregate living settings (most facility-based) where the risk of transmission of COVID-19 would be very high if it were introduced into the environment. We appreciate and are thankful for everyone’s cooperation as we all work within the limitations imposed by the pandemic.

It is important to acknowledge that our policies and procedures are guided by infection control directives, principles, and guidance issued by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health’s Office of Inpatient Management, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. By adhering to these guidelines, and implementing strict requirements for health screening, physical distancing, proper use of personal protective equipment, and rigorous hygiene measures (masks, hand hygiene, environmental cleaning), our programs have been successful in minimizing the risk of infection to our staff and the youth and families we serve.

The success of these actions locally and statewide has allowed for the careful implementation of a stepwise resumption of visiting in DMH’s IRTPs/CIRT. As an increasing number of individuals across the Commonwealth are vaccinated, we have worked with public health experts to update our guidance consistent with the latest infection control best practices.

Fully vaccinated individuals are defined as 14 days or more after their final dose. In a 2-dose series, like the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, the individual is fully vaccinated 14 days or more after their second dose. After a single-dose vaccine, like Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen vaccine, the individual is fully vaccinated 14 days or more after the single dose.

Programs may encourage visitors to become vaccinated when they have the opportunity. While visitor vaccination can help prevent the spread of COVID-19, visitors are not required to be tested or vaccinated (or show proof of such) as a condition of visitation.

Therefore, the following modifications are being made to the current DMH/DPH Visitor Policy (07/01/20) and will take effect immediately:

1. Parents/LAR may have in-person visits with their child longer than 30 minutes at the IRTP/CIRT subject to sufficient staffing and no other competing demands impacting operations;
2. Face coverings or masks must be worn by all individuals for whom it is safe to do so, regardless of vaccination status. Note that masks may not be appropriate for
   1. Individuals with I/DD or a behavioral condition who are not able to tolerate wearing a mask
   2. Individuals for whom wearing a mask causes trouble breathing
3. Except in the case of a fully vaccinated resident and a fully vaccinated visitor, individuals should maintain physical distancing to the maximum extent possible during the visit. We acknowledge that physical contact may be desired by individuals who have not seen each other for some time, regardless of vaccination status. In order to reduce risk of transmission, individuals should:
   1. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol before and after contact
   2. Avoid close face-to-face contact and kissing, even when face coverings are used
   3. Hug with faces in opposite directions
   4. Limit the duration of close physical contact
4. In-person visits may occur in designated outdoor or indoor areas at the facility. Outdoor areas may be enclosed / fenced in courtyards (subject to availability, proximity, and population mix) or on-grounds areas (not enclosed) in designated areas, subject to the criteria identified above and the youth’s privilege status determined by his/her attending psychiatrist. Designated areas must be within visual proximity of the facility so that conditions can be observed. Visitors may not take youth outside the designated areas.
5. In-person visits may or may not be supervised by IRTP/CIRT staff and are subject to safety and privileging criteria noted above.
6. Youth who are fully vaccinated may visit with parent/LAR(s) who are fully vaccinated in a private room at the IRTP/CIRT subject to privilege/safety status determined by the his/her attending psychiatrist.
   1. Residents who are fully vaccinated may visit with loved ones who are fully vaccinated without maintaining physical distance, if both are wearing facemasks, as able.
7. Visits will be limited to members of the same household. The number of visitors at any one time will be limited by the space to allow for physical distancing.
8. Off grounds visits (passes) may be permitted:
   1. Subject to a determination after careful safety assessment and a physician’s order that identifies:
      1. The pass is clinically appropriate and consistent with the treatment plan; and
      2. The youth will be reasonably able to comply with the agreed parameters of the pass and requirements for physical distancing, including wearing a mask;
   2. To designated outdoor safe destinations or brief visits (under 15 minutes) to indoor locations for essential errands and for a specified period of time, as agreed between the IRTP/CIRT and the parent/LAR;
   3. The activity, destination and duration have been discussed and agreed among the youth, parent/LAR, and IRTP/CIRT treatment team;
   4. Re-entry protocols, including screening and medically appropriate isolation as ordered, shall be applied upon the youth’s return to the IRTP/CIRT;
   5. Overnight passes are permitted as defined in the Extended Pass Guidance.
9. During off grounds visits (passes), youth and parent/LAR(s) who are fully vaccinated are not required to maintain physical distance in private settings, such as a private home.
   1. However, fully vaccinated individuals should continue to physically distance and wear face coverings in public settings or settings in which some individuals may not be vaccinated.

Except as outlined in this memo, all other provisions of the 07/01/20 policy and previous guidance, such as scheduling appointments, visitor screening, facility search policies, prohibition on bringing outside food, etc., remain in effect.

Expansion of visitation opportunities is dependent on several factors:

1. No current exposure of staff/youth in the IRTPs/CIRT;
2. No current exposure of parent/LAR;
3. Parent/LAR adherence to the COVID-19 safety protocols; and
4. Youth’s reasonable adherence to the COVID-19 safety protocols and capacity to participate in the modified practice.

These modifications will be closely monitored and may be suspended by DMH or the IRTP/CIRT Program Director as individual, programmatic or systemic circumstances dictate.

We are relying on you, the parents and LARs of the youth we serve, to help us sustain the success we have had in preventing infection within our programs. We need your support and your cooperation, and with it we are hopeful that we will be able to expand your opportunities to spend more time with your children under less restrictive conditions. Without it we run the risk of virus spread and the need to backtrack on the progress we have made.

If you have any questions, please contact the program director at the IRTP/CIRT where your child is receiving treatment.

Thank you.