

# Children's Mental Health and COVID-19

## Flexibility, support and collaboration in a time of crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has been stressful for many Minnesotans, and fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions. Children are of special concern. It is critical that children who need mental health services can and do continue to receive care.

At the same time, when with the current public health emergency, every system we are used to — from supplying grocery stores to driver's license renewals — have been stretched to their limits. This includes the children's mental health system.

### Response to the pandemic: increasing access, providing flexibility

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- **DHS expanded access via telemedicine or other video or telephone services.** DHS received federal approval to temporarily ease certain limits in existing law for receiving needed care and services through telephone and video visits. Services that can now use internet video or telephone, include Certified Day Treatment, Children's Therapeutic Services and Supports (CTSS), and Targeted Case Management.
- DHS has also expanded the use of telemedicine for **school-linked mental health** to continue to deliver mental health supports to our students and families. At the same time, DHS is working to identify resources and recommend future utilization in the light of emerging needs of children and families in the face of pandemic.
- Approximately \$15 billion from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) **Provider Relief Fund** will go to eligible Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) providers. The Behavioral Health Division has made sure needs of behavioral health residential providers in terms of staffing are well represented and addressed.
- **Trauma screening** continues to occur via telehealth as clinicians adapt to needs during the COVID-19 crisis. Diagnostic assessments are required for most mental health services across the life span and must be completed at least annually for children.
- To help ease the work load for children's mental health service providers, we have **waived statutory requirements for the recertification of certain mental health providers.** At many mental health services provider locations across the state, staff are working remotely, making the recertification process a challenging one.
- The Behavioral Health Division is working with partners across DHS on an effort to ensure that **residential providers can be provided support on staffing costs** in case of staff being sick.
- A statewide **Telemedicine Study** is taking advantage of the emergency waivers to study the effectiveness of telemedicine and telehealth service delivery methods. This will allow DHS to make well-informed recommendations regarding the future of telemedicine in Minnesota.

## Current efforts

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The pandemic has highlighted the importance of certain programs that are underway, especially those focused on long term, systemic change.

- **Culturally Responsive Workforce Grants** help decrease the inequities and disparities experienced in the behavioral health field by embracing the unique experiences of Minnesota's diverse cultural communities.
- **Children's residential treatment facilities and psychiatric residential treatment facilities (PRTF)** are essential services and have continued to provide intensive residential and inpatient mental health treatment to youth and young adults who are vulnerable or at-risk of serious mental illness during the COVID-19 pandemic. These facilities specialize in the treatment of trauma.
- **Minnesota System of Care** is an ambitious effort to reimagining children's mental health into the future. Key to this is WrapMN, which brings together a team of family, friends, community members, and professionals to create a plan of care. Thus far, 770 children are eligible and/or referred for System of Care pilot services.

## Addressing trauma

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It's too early to tell know the full impact on children and society our communities of as a result of the pandemic COVID-19 or how many children may face trauma.

However, trauma screening and treatment are key pieces of children's mental health services.

- DHS supports **Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**, a model of psychotherapy that effectively combines trauma-sensitive interventions with cognitive behavioral therapy.
- **Intensive Treatment in Foster Care** provides mental health services for children up to 21 living in a family foster care and suffering from mental illness and functional impairments.
- DHS is working to integrate children's mental health screening within the **child welfare and juvenile justice systems**. Focusing on these at-risk populations and particularly the uninsured and underinsured, grant funding can provide mental health treatment for children who wouldn't otherwise receive these services.
- DHS is collaborating with MDE to explore and identify action steps to **expand CTSS services in schools** across the state.

## Waiver process

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Changes needed to offer increased flexibility during the pandemic required an executive order and usually a waiver from the federal government before it could be implemented. As of the beginning of August 2020, DHS has secured approval for 86 waivers.



Children's behavioral health related queries: contact [Neerja Singh, Deputy Director, Behavioral Health Division](#).