



Early Support for Infants & Toddlers (ESIT) Guidance Memo #2020-01

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Dear ESIT Partners:

The Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) State Leadership Team has received a number of questions and requests for support and guidance from early intervention provider agencies related to COVID-19. We have also received updates from Local Lead Agencies about how they are engaging in crisis response planning and supporting the needs of both staff and families receiving services. **Please keep the ESIT State Leadership Team informed of the status of your early intervention operations, including modifications and/or program closures, by emailing Laurie Thomas, ESIT Program Administrator, at Laurie.Thomas@dcyf.wa.gov.**

Consistent with federal and state guidance on the mitigation of COVID-19 and to ensure strong practices of social distancing, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is providing the following information:

- **Effective March 19, 2020, DCYF, the state lead agency, is suspending face-to-face services** statewide for the ESIT Program through April 24, 2020.
- **The provision of virtual visits is recommended to the greatest extent possible.** DCYF is encouraging organizations to utilize creative strategies to engage and support families during this uncertain time.
- **DCYF understands that not all agencies, providers or families are currently set up to conduct virtual visits,** staff may be reassigned and there are backlogs on some technology due to the increased demands of teleworking. We know there may be many more questions as it relates to virtual visits, if you have specific questions about virtual visits, please email your ESIT Program Consultant for additional resources.
- **Support additional purchases** necessary to ensure strong virtual practices, including a process for requesting additional IDEA Part C funds.
- **DCYF will maintain ongoing payment of providers** by paying all invoices with valid program costs. DCYF is committed to sustaining ESIT's current base of highly qualified personnel and supporting the continuation of important services to the maximum extent possible.
- **State Apportionment Funding – Birth to Three Services:** In partnership with DCYF, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is committed to providing ongoing state apportionment payments to school districts to support continuity of early intervention services to the extent possible, for children ages 0-3 in accordance with [published DCYF guidance](#), during school closures as a result of the COVID-19 state of emergency.
- **DCYF asks that organizations document the financial and staffing impacts of COVID-19** on the program and organization to help us communicate your challenges and work to provide solutions and supports.

The information outlined below is designed to provide as much clarity regarding federal and state guidance and expectations as possible while promoting the most proactive approach possible during this state of emergency.

Essential Information for ESIT Providers to Know:

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) recently provided [policy guidance regarding service provision during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak](#). This questions and answers document outlines states' responsibilities for both Part B and Part C IDEA services to infants, toddlers and children with disabilities and their families, and to the staff serving these children during the COVID-19 outbreak. Questions specific to Part C can be found in Section B. DCYF has also posted coronavirus updates and early intervention providers can submit COVID-19 questions to dcyf.covid-19@dcyf.wa.gov and please courtesy copy dcyf.esit@dcyf.wa.gov.

There are additional resources and guidance available to DCYF clients and partners on the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) website. The following links may be helpful for the clients DCYF serves:

- [Parent and Caretaker Resources and Recommendations](#)
- [School Resources and Recommendations](#)
- [Child Care Resources and Recommendations](#)
- [COVID-19 Prevention Tips](#)

COVID-19 is a health-related issue and the best guidance is available on the DOH [website](#). If you have specific questions that cannot be answered by these resources, call DOH's public call center at 1-800-525-0127.

Recommended Actions for ESIT Providers to Consider Doing:

1. Review and update or develop and establish a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) that outlines the steps your organization plans to take to ensure continuity of services while supporting the health and safety of staff providing services, and the children and families receiving them.
2. Inform and/or submit for approval the COOP to your Board of Directors or applicable governing structure.
3. If a COOP is developed, share a copy of your agency's COOP with the ESIT Program Consultant assigned to your region.

Preventing and Addressing Potential Discrimination: On March 4, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education and the Office for Civil Rights issued a [Letter to Education Leaders](#) to remind all education and early intervention partners that services and supports are to be provided without discrimination or harassment to children and families. They noted an increase in reports of stereotyping, harassment and bullying directed at persons perceived to be of Chinese American or more generally Asian descent, including students. Please continue to join us in taking special care to ensure that all Washington children and families can access early intervention services in a manner that is free from discrimination.

Stakeholder Engagement: We will be calling on the State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) Executive Committee and other key stakeholder groups to assist us with effectively implementing the required adjustments in services and identifying additional challenges that will need to be addressed.

Thank you for joining us in continuing to support infants, toddlers and families during a particularly stressful time.

If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Laurie Thomas, ESIT Program Administrator, at laurie.thomas@dcyf.wa.gov.

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