



**DIRECTIVE OF THE GOVERNOR
20-02**

March 26, 2020

To: Ross Hunter, Secretary
Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families

From: Governor Jay Inslee

Subject: Visitation During the COVID-19 Emergency

As you know, the benefits of maintaining consistent contact between children in foster care and their parents and siblings are significant across several measures, making visitation services one of the most valuable forms of support for families involved with our State's child welfare system. During the current emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that visitation services be delivered in a manner that allows for the social distancing necessary to keep everyone safe—children, parents, foster families, visitation providers, and case workers.

For these reasons, I am directing you to immediately develop policies to support Proclamation 20-33, regarding visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings. These new policies must support implementation of video visitation services as follows:

- Provide for video visitation using video conferencing options that comply with legal requirements and security standards for sensitive data and information.
- Utilize available funding to acquire and expedite the distribution of necessary equipment to parents, visitation providers, and caregivers to assist in the delivery of video visitation services.
- Prepare and distribute guidance regarding the use of video technology to visitation providers, parents, caregivers, and staff, including guidance to support video visitation activities for children of all ages.
- Ensure technology support is readily available as needed to assist with trouble-shooting in implementing this directive.
- Conduct regular meetings by telephone or video with visitation providers to assess implementation of video visitation, address challenges, and identify areas for improving the video visitation experience for children and families.

- Provide regular updates about Department of Health guidelines regarding COVID-19 and social distancing to agency field offices, caregivers, parents, providers, and other key partners.
- Consult with the Department of Health to outline a plan for shifting back to in-person visitation when it is safe to do so.

I also direct you to adopt emergency rules to require foster parents to use available means for video visitation in order to support ongoing contact for children, parents and siblings, consistent with each child's case plan. Please prioritize this work in order to begin video visitation services not later than Wednesday, April 1, 2020.

During this unprecedented state of emergency, I am encouraging and asking all sectors of the state's child welfare system to pull together in support of children and their families. These are very trying times for everyone, and we can make them less trying and less traumatic for children when we keep their interests and well-being at the forefront.

Thank you for your leadership.