

April 21, 2020

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-33-20

This All County Information Notice (ACIN) provides county child welfare agencies, Title IV-E Agreement tribes, and juvenile probation departments information regarding the compliance reporting for contacts completed with children and families through videoconferencing during the declared Coronavirus (COVID-19) State of Emergency.



KIM JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
744 P Street • Sacramento, CA 95814 • www.cdss.ca.gov



GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

April 21, 2020

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-33-20

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS
ALL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM COORDINATORS
ALL FOSTER CARE MANAGERS
ALL TITLE IV-E AGREEMENT TRIBES
ALL TRANSITIONAL HOUSING COORDINATORS
ALL COUNTY RFA AND ADOPTION PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL CDSS ADOPTION REGIONAL OFFICES

SUBJECT: MONTHLY CASEWORKER VISIT COMPLIANCE USING
ALTERNATE CONTACT METHODS DURING THE COVID-19
CALIFORNIA STATE OF EMERGENCY

REFERENCE: PROVIDING CHILD WELFARE AND PROBATION
SERVICES DURING COVID-19 STATE OF EMERGENCY [ALL
COUNTY LETTER \(ACL\) 20-25](#); DOCUMENTING CHILD
WELFARE AND PROBATION CONTACTS BY ALTERNATE
MEANS DURING COVID-19 STATE OF EMERGENCY [ACL 20-31](#);
[CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL SECTION 7.3 TITLE IV-B,
PROGRAMMATIC REQUIREMENTS, QUESTION #8; 42 U.S.C.
622\(b\)\(17\)](#)

This notice is to provide clarification to child welfare agencies, Title IV-E Agreement tribes,¹ and juvenile probation departments regarding how visits conducted using videoconferencing will impact Monthly Caseworker Visits (MCV) compliance requirements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed and disrupted the ways in which families and communities engage with one another. The response to this health crisis is continually evolving on many levels. This is an unprecedented time, requiring child welfare agencies, Title IV-E tribes, and juvenile probation departments to consider and utilize

¹ For the purpose of this notice, a Title IV-E Agreement tribe means those with an agreement pursuant to WIC section 10553.1

alternatives to conventional methods of contact to slow the spread of COVID-19 while ensuring child safety and well-being.

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) issued instructions to counties and Title IV-E tribes via [ACL 20-25](#) regarding how to assess the appropriateness of videoconferencing when it has been determined that a face-to-face visit is not necessary to ensure the child's safety and well-being. In certain circumstances, as described in that ACL, videoconferencing may be used as an alternative when conventional face-to-face visits are not possible or prudent and will count toward the MCV requirement. Additionally, visits conducted via videoconferencing will be counted toward the in-home visit requirement.

As addressed in [ACL 20-25](#), any form of communication with the child(ren),² parent(s), and providers must be documented in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). It is recommended that all contacts be captured in the contact notes and include the method in which the visit was conducted (e.g. videoconferencing). [ACL 20-31](#) provided detailed instructions on how to document MCV that occur via videoconferencing in CWS/CMS.

Monthly Caseworker Visits Background

Children in foster care placements are required to receive monthly caseworker visits.³ Generally, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has considered only face-to-face visitation to count towards this requirement. However, ACF has issued recent guidance through the Child Welfare Policy Manual⁴ permitting Title IV-B⁵ agencies to waive the in-person aspect of the monthly caseworker visits and allow them to instead be accomplished through videoconferencing when an emergency prohibits or strongly discourages face-to-face contact for a public health reason or other similar public or individual health challenges. The determination that it is appropriate to accomplish a required monthly face-to-face through videoconferencing during this public health crisis must be made on a case-by-case basis with consideration of specific factors, as outlined in [ACL 20-25](#). Additionally, caseworkers must conduct the videoconference in accordance with existing timeframes established in Title IV-B of the Social Security Act, and must closely assess the child's safety during each conference.

² For the purpose of this notice, child includes minors and nonminor dependents who are supervised by child welfare or probation, as applicable, or new referrals/re-entries.

³ Section 422(b)(17) of the Social Security Act

⁴ CWPM section 7.3 TITLE IV-B, Programmatic Requirements, Question #8

⁵ Title IV-B of the Social Security Act

Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Case Review Ratings

While videoconferencing will satisfy the requirements of meeting the MCV requirement, the standard for CFSR case reviews will continue to be determined based on the circumstances of the case. As such, it is important that counties fully document how the decision to complete the contact via videoconferencing was made.

Per [ACL 20-25](#), decisions about whether face-to-face visits should occur are child-specific and must be made based on the training and experience of the caseworker considering all available information. Factors to consider when determining if face-to-face visits are necessary during this public health state of emergency include:

- Is the child being visited by other professionals, tribal representatives and/or mandated reporters during this time period and the caseworker can receive an updated report from those professionals and/or reporters regarding the child?
- Has the child been in the same placement for the last 4 months and the caseworker has determined that the placement is stable, without any concerns noted?
- Has the child been seen in person by a Foster Family Agency social worker within the last 14 days with no concerns reported?
- Is the child in a short-term residential therapeutic program or group home (in-state or out-of-state) and receiving ongoing treatment with a mental health professional, as well as on-site case management by the agency staff?
- Has the child been visited by their case manager in each of the prior three months with no concerns noted regarding the placement?
- The chronological and developmental age of the child, as young children and children with developmental delays or disabilities may not be able to verbalize or otherwise communicate needs and safety issues remotely.

Case reviews will continue to assess the appropriate frequency of contact based on case-specific circumstances. If it is determined that face-to-face monthly visits are not appropriate based on case or child-specific circumstances, counties should assess which level of contact is adequate. In some instances, weekly or biweekly video conferencing may be necessary to assess safety and child well-being.

It is recommended that caseworkers document the assessment and decision-making process of the need to conduct face-to-face visits in the case file. Additionally, if it is determined that face-to-face visits are necessary, caseworkers are encouraged to document efforts to attempt face-to-face contact when those efforts are not successful.

All County Information Notice No. I-33-20
Page Four

If you have any questions or need additional guidance about MCV requirements during the COVID-19 State of Emergency, please email CFSD@dss.ca.gov. Questions about case reviews should be emailed to the Case Review Section at cwscasereviews@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By

DAVID McDOWELL, Ph.D.
Chief, Children's Services Operations and Evaluation Branch
Children and Family Services Division