
**ORANGE COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY
CFS OPERATIONS MANUAL**

Effective Date: April 15, 2020
Revised: September 3, 2020

Policy No.: A-0412-D

COVID 19: Interim Guidance on Child Abuse Registry Screenings and Emergency Response Investigations

Purpose To provide interim guidance regarding Child Abuse Registry (CAR) screenings and Emergency Response (ER) investigations during the state of emergency related to COVID-19.

Background Due to the COVID-19 nationwide pandemic and declared state of emergency, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has issued All County Letter (ACL) 20-28 to provide supplemental guidance related to the conduct of CAR screenings and ER investigations, in the interest of reducing the spread of the virus while ensuring that children are safe from abuse and neglect.

Child Abuse Registry (CAR) Screenings **Effective immediately and until further notice** the CAR Senior Social Worker (SSW) will complete the following additional steps while following established hotline protocols:

A. Questions to Assess for COVID-19:

To assess for potential/known exposure or confirmed presence of the COVID-19 virus when an in-person investigation is necessary, the CAR SSW will ask the following:

- Has anyone in the home tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
- In the past 14 days, has anyone in the household had any of the following symptoms:
 - fever/chills/body aches
 - cough
 - shortness of breath
 - muscle aches
 - headache
 - sore throat
 - new loss of taste or smell
- Has anyone in the household had close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 14 days?
- Is anyone in the home under quarantine by the local public health department or a medical professional?

If the answer to any of the above questions is “yes”, the CAR SSW will relay this information immediately to the ER SSW so that the information is known prior to the initial in-person visit.

Note: When a reporting party is a HIPPA covered entity and expresses concerns about sharing information regarding the above health questions, the CAR SSW may reference the guidance issued by the [California Office of Health Information Integrity](#) regarding the sharing of critical information by covered entities during disaster response and emergencies.

B. Collateral Contact:

To assist in determining the response priority of the referral, the CAR SSW may contact collateral individuals to gather additional information to help inform the circumstances around the allegations and to determine whether an in-person investigation is necessary. If the safety of the child(ren) can be confirmed by the CAR SSW through collateral contacts, the circumstances will be documented using the screener narrative and the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Hotline Tools.

Refer to CFS P&P [Child Abuse Registry \(CAR\) \(M-0109\)](#) for further guidance on assessing child abuse and neglect allegations, determining disposition, response time, and assignment of child abuse reports.

**In-Person
Contact
During an
Emergency
Response
Investigation**

If the ER SSW receives information from the CAR SSW that the reporting party answered “yes” to any of the questions outlined in the “Child Abuse Registry (CAR) Screenings” section, the ER SSW will consult a Senior Social Services Supervisor (SSSS) prior to conducting the investigation to develop a plan to complete the investigation as safely as possible. Refer to the “Safety During In-Person Investigations” section for further guidance.

Prior to making a home visit, the ER SSW may call the family to assess exposure to COVID-19 using the questions listed in the “Child Abuse Registry Screenings” section, as long as contacting the family in advance would not jeopardize the safety of the child or effectiveness of the investigation. Otherwise, the ER SSW may ask the questions upon arrival, and prior to entering the home, with consideration to the family’s confidentiality.

When completing an in-person investigation, the ER SSW will follow established CFS policy regarding the parties to the referral that are required to be contacted in-person. Refer to CFS P&P [Abuse Investigations-Practice Guidelines \(A-0412\)](#) for further guidance.

Exception: Per Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) Sections 31-125.2 through 31-125.221 and ACL 20-28, If it appears the allegations in the referral are “unfounded” after in-person interviews of all of the children alleged to be abused, neglected or exploited, and at least one adult who has information regarding the allegations, the ER SSW, with SSSS and Program Manager (PM) approval, may close the referral without further investigation.

Home Entry Authorization

Per CFS policy, the ER SSW will not enter a home without an adult present to provide permission. If the adults refuse entry to the home due to concerns over COVID-19, the ER SSW may request to interview the child(ren) and other individuals separately outside of the residence.

A refusal of entrance to the home and/or access to see the child(ren) for any reason does not remove the requirement to complete the in-person investigation.

Should such refusal occur, refer to existing guidance outlined in CFS P&Ps [Abuse Investigations-Practice Guidelines \(A-0412\)](#) and [Warrants \(G-0901\)](#).

Safety During In-Person Investigations

Effective immediately and until further notice, prior to attempting an in-person contact during an investigation, the ER SSW will take all recommended precautions to reduce risk for transmission of COVID-19 (e.g., maintain 6-foot distance from others, avoid direct contact, wash hands thoroughly, use hand sanitizer, and face-coverings), as well as the utilization of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Per ACL 20-28, the following actions during in-person interactions may be considered, as applicable:

- While workers must make efforts to observe the physical environment of the home to evaluate safety of the child(ren), the remainder of the visit may be conducted outside of the residence, when feasible to do so in a manner which maintains confidentiality
- Avoid touching surfaces in the residence as much as possible. Use a tissue or appropriate hand coverings to touch a surface when needed
- Avoid shaking hands with family members or engaging in other forms of physical greetings
- After each home visit, clean and sanitize by washing hands with soap and warm water or using hand sanitizer or sanitizing wipes
- Photograph evidence, safety plans, and/or documents that require a signature, leaving the physical copy with the family.

Alternatively, document the family's agreement to the safety plan on the signature page

- Have extra pens or other supplies on hand to give to the family so that these items do not need to be returned
- When available, use hand sanitizer or antibacterial wipes, wash hands, and wipe down anything that was brought into a home immediately upon leaving the residence
- After each home visit, remove and wash clothes as soon as possible
- Avoid duplicative contacts

Emergency Placements

In the event of an emergency placement, the ER SSW may call the Department of Justice Command Center at (916) 227-3244 to access the California Law Enforcement Telecommunication System (CLETS):

- After business hours and on weekends
- If working remotely and unable to email the request

When calling the Command Center, the ER SSW will:

- Verify their identity, explain they are working remotely and that they are unable to e-mail the request and do not have access to their landline office phone
- Request the CLETS results be e-mailed to the ER SSW's county e-mail address

Refer to CFS P&P [CLETS \(B-0116\)](#) for further guidance on obtaining statewide criminal history information.

Legal Mandates

[All County Letter \(ACL\) 20-28 Interim Guidance For Emergency Response Social Workers and Probation Officers During the Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) California State of Emergency](#)

[Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures \(MPP\), Division 31, Sections 31-125.2 through 31-125.221](#)