



**Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Child and Family Services
2020-2024 Disaster Response and Recovery Plan
Updated SFY 2022**

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INTRODUCTION

Nevada is one of two states with a hybrid child welfare administrative structure. In the two largest urban counties child welfare services are state-administered and county operated. The remaining 15 rural counties are state-administered, and state operated. The Nevada Division of Child and Family Services operates under the umbrella of the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Across the county, natural and man-made disasters can disrupt or seriously disrupt the routine ways child welfare agencies operate and serve children, youth, and families. In the event of any disaster, essential child welfare agencies caring for vulnerable populations such as abused and neglected children, do what they can to prepare for natural and man-made disasters. The [Nevada Standard Hazard Mitigation Plan](#) divided the threats and hazards into varying categories.

- **Natural Categories** – this is defined as natural disaster threats such as earthquakes, canal failure, or flooding. Nevada has several fault lines running through it that have the potential to cause major damage to communities. Many areas of the state, such as Reno and Fallon, sit alongside the Truckee River that, when it exceeds flood state, causes flooding in a manner of hours.
- **Security Threats** – these are posed by international terrorism, domestic terrorism, and criminal acts.
- **Industrial Threats** – these are created by the movement of hazardous materials (HAZMAT) around the state by both truck and rail traffic. HAZMAT, utilized in mining operations throughout the state, pose a significant hazard as well.
- **Cyber Threats** – this is defined as a deliberate or malicious attempt to penetrate and disrupt computer-based information and control systems.

The Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 amended the requirements for a state to have a compliant Title IV-B state Plan by adding [section 422\(b\)\(16\)](#) to require that all states have in place procedures for responding to a disaster, including how the state will:

- **Criteria A:** Identify, locate, and continue availability of services for children under state care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster
- **Criteria B:** Respond, as appropriate, to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster and provide services in those cases
- **Criteria C:** Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster
- **Criteria D:** Preserve essential program records
- **Criteria E:** Coordinate services and share information with other states

Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 432.410 and 424.0367 requires a licensee that operates a foster home to develop and implement a disaster plan for the care of children in their home. Additionally, each agency which provides child welfare services is required to develop and implement a plan for the care of child.

In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic that started in 2020, the DCFS State Administrator issued guidance to the regions based on the existing disaster plan and guidance from the Administration of Children and Families and other state and federal agencies. Guidance from the DCFS Administrator initially started on March 10, 2020. On March 15, 2020, in accordance with Governor Sisolak's directive, the DCFS Administrator released email guidance that the State of Nevada would immediately shut down all non-essential state offices to avoid in-person contact that could potentially spread the disease. This pandemic has since carried over into 2021 and due to the unique aspects of the ongoing health crisis, the DCFS Administrator continues to issue guidance and updates on a routine basis when needed. Specific guidance is referenced under each essential function. Refer to the [COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update section](#) for those updates.

IMPLEMENTATION

This plan is activated when ordered by the DCFS Administrator for children under state care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster. The plan is designed to be implemented when a disaster interferes with the day-to-day operations of child welfare agencies. Coordination between DCFS and the regions along with the various agencies under the DHHS and the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) is essential to effectively prepare and respond to disasters. Activation of this plan will end when the agency can resume its usual operating procedures or when given a new operations plan by the DCFS Administrator.

GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS

This plan is based on the following assumptions:

- The plan depends on timely communications and effective leadership
- The plan applies to all hazards and not a specific event
- The plan identifies priority services of child welfare
- The plan describes only the general emergency procedures staff will need to follow. Supervisors and Administrators may need to improvise or follow those instructions provided by state emergency management personnel to meet the specific conditions of an actual disaster
- The plan assumes DHHS will continue to operate to provide SNAP benefits, Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) grants, Medicaid, and other services
- The plan assumes that community emergency services will be in place to provide the necessities of shelter, rescue, evacuation, fire control, transportation, and any other identified basic need
- The plan assumes child welfare agencies are all participating in the DHHS or DEM emergency response system for homeland security and other types of emergencies
- The plan focuses on the unique responsibilities of child welfare agencies for foster children in foster family homes, residential facilities in state or out-of-state including those children with special needs, and detention facilities for children

- The plan assumes staff and supervisors will be informed and trained on how to implement emergency procedures when disasters strike

DISASTER PLAN PROCEDURES

CWS Disaster Response Criteria A:	Identify, locate, and continue availability of services, including a plan for providing temporary shelter for children under state care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster
Essential Function	Identification and location process of children who may be displaced
Process Description:	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All social workers/caseworkers or designee with an assigned caseload will contact the caregivers/foster homes on their assigned caseloads via telephone and/or home visits to identify and locate children who are displaced as a result of the disaster or emergency as well as assess client needs (foster parents may call caseworkers first however needs assessment and location must still be ascertained). • All social workers/caseworkers or designee with an assigned caseload will contact those youth living independently but still under the jurisdiction of the State via telephone and/or home visits to identify and locate youth who are displaced because of the disaster/emergency as well as assess needs (youth may call caseworkers first however needs assessment and location must still be ascertained). • If social workers/caseworkers are unable to reach the home by telephone, a visit will be required (if safe to do so) to determine the safety status of the child/children and the home. • All social workers/caseworkers or designee, with an assigned caseload will report to the respective manager or designee the status, location, and any special needs of each child on their caseload, who are living in an area affected by the disaster/emergency. • The manager or designee will report this information to their respective agency administrator or designee. • All social workers/caseworkers or designee, with an assigned caseload will document in UNITY (or on paper if necessary) all delays and postponements of case plan required activities, child and parent visits, court hearings, administrative reviews, etc. for those children affected by the disaster/emergency.
Process Description	<p><u>FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCFS Administrator or designee will maintain contact with their respective agency managers or designee to ensure children under child welfare care

	<p>and custody who are affected by the disaster/emergency are located, safe or for those children who cannot be located, are reported to DEM, American Red Cross and/or law enforcement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FPO staff may be assigned to assist with locating children. • In the event any agency which provides child welfare services is unable to continue to provide services to children in their custody due to being overwhelmed by a disaster, the DCFS Administrator or designee will provide the information to the DEM. This scenario assumes that all regions (Washoe, Rural, or Clark) will have declared a state of emergency.
<p>Essential Function</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Communication and Coordination of Services with Caregivers/Foster Homes</p>
<p>Process Description:</p>	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All caregivers/foster homes will have on file a home disaster plan which identifies alternative locations in the event of a need for evacuation. Included in the disaster plan is a telephone number identified for foster parents who are to call to check in with their respective child welfare agency as soon after a disaster as possible (in the event the child welfare agency has not already been in contact). • Caregivers/foster homes are required to be knowledgeable about the disaster plans for schools in which children in their care are enrolled. • Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 424.615 requires the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The manner in which to evacuate the foster home and the designation of an alternate location where the members of the foster home, including, without limitation, any child with a disability or special medical needs, may reside during an evacuation. ○ The manner in which an evacuation will proceed if a child is at school or otherwise away from the foster home, and a description of the plan for any such child. ○ A list of important telephone numbers, including, without limitation, alternate telephone numbers for the licensing authority, the staff of the foster home and an agency which provides child welfare services or other agency or person who has placed a child in the foster home. ○ A plan for communicating before, during and after an evacuation, if possible, with any person or entity having physical custody of a child in the foster home. ○ A description of the manner in which the licensee will receive information from emergency management personnel, and the manner in which the licensee or staff will coordinate with emergency personnel and juvenile courts, as required.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A list of critical items to take, if possible, when evacuating the foster home, including, without limitation, medication, medical cards, and medically necessary equipment for any child with a disability or special medical needs. ○ A description of the manner in which the licensee will make services available to children in the foster home to address the emotional impact of the emergency. <p><u>FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child welfare administrators or designees will maintain contact with their respective managers to ensure that the communication process for families with children under child welfare care and custody has been maintained. ● All ICPC placements in the state will be checked for the child’s safety and location. As soon as reasonably possible, the ICPC Deputy Compact Administrator (DCA) for the state that placed the child will be notified of the child’s safety and status. ● In the event an agency which provides child welfare services is unable to continue to provide services to children in their custody due to being overwhelmed by a disaster, the DCFS Administrator or designee will obtain the contact list from the affected jurisdiction and may assign staff to assist in making contact. ● In the event an agency which provides child welfare services is unable to continue to provide services to children in their custody due to being overwhelmed by a disaster, the DCFS Administrator or designee will provide all information to the DEM. This scenario assumes that the affected region (Washoe, Rural, or Clark) will have declared a state of emergency and has requested assistance from the state emergency services.
<p>Essential Function</p>	<p>Identification of evacuation procedures</p>
<p>Process Description:</p>	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Caregivers/foster homes receive training on emergency management procedures for earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters. Emergency preparedness is part of the foster parent training process. ● Children in foster care will evacuate with caregivers/foster parents according to direction by emergency officials. A primary “shelter in place” modality is taught to all foster parents during training. ● Evacuation may not always be to a designated shelter but may be to a predetermined location with friends, relatives, etc. These locations should be included in foster home disaster plans and updated accordingly. ● All social workers/caseworkers or designee with an assigned caseload will contact the caregivers/foster homes on their assigned caseloads via

	<p>telephone if possible, to identify and locate children who may need to be relocated due to a disaster/emergency. Foster parents may call caseworkers first however needs assessment must still be ascertained.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medically fragile children will be prioritized in the event of a disaster/emergency, to ensure that calls or visits can be made to check the wellbeing and safety as well and to determine if relocation is necessary. <p><u>FPO Office:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCFS Administrator or designee will maintain contact with the regions to ensure children under child welfare care and custody are located and safe. For those children who need to be relocated, regions will ensure that transportation is available via foster families, facilities, or staff. If additional support is needed, a report is made to DEM, American Red Cross, and/or law enforcement. • FPO staff may assist in making telephone contact and/or visits when necessary and safe to do so. • In the event an agency which provides child welfare services is unable to continue to provide services to children in their care and custody due to being overwhelmed by a disaster, the DCFS Administrator or designee will provide all information to the DEM. This scenario assumes that the affected region (Washoe, Rural, or Clark) will have declared a state of emergency and has requested assistance from the state emergency services.
Essential Function	Parental notification procedures
Process Description:	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents of children in the affected area and known to live out of state will be notified by the child’s social worker/caseworker or designee of the child’s status and location, if appropriate to do so. • Parent contact is documented in UNITY. • Coordination will be made with mental health crisis teams if a parental contact includes notice of a death of a child. • Parents will be informed of other disaster related services such as those offered by American Red Cross, Salvation Army, State Mental Health Services, etc. if appropriate to do so. • See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021 <p><u>FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DCFS Administrator or designee will maintain contact with their respective manager to ensure parental contacts have been made as necessary and appropriate.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FPO staff may assist offices as necessary in making telephone contact when necessary and appropriate to do so. • In the event an agency which provides child welfare services is unable to continue to provide services to children in their care and custody due to being overwhelmed by a disaster or emergency, the DCFS Administrator or designee will provide the information to the DEM. This scenario assumes that the affected region (Washoe, Rural, or Clark) will have declared a state of emergency and has requested assistance from the state emergency services.
<p>Essential Function</p>	<p>Alternative processes for providing continued services</p>
<p>Process Description:</p>	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restoration of the following services is essential and takes precedence over any other services or functions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hotline Services. ○ Investigations: ability to investigate reports of abuse and neglect and place children in safe out of home living arrangements if needed. ○ Ensure safety of children who are wards placed in out of home care and focus on children with special needs and dependent on technology (i.e. wheelchairs, respirators, sight impaired, etc.). ○ Execute consents for children in care (i.e., emergency surgery). ○ Payment to caregivers. • See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021
	<p><u>FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DCFS Administrator or designee will work with the affected regions and/or state emergency services to assist in the restoration of services and functions in a rank order of importance and as quickly as possible. • The DCFS administrator or designee will maintain contact with administrators or designees of other Health and Human Services divisions to determine status of other services and will advise child welfare regions accordingly.

Essential Function	Staff assignment process
Process Description:	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees will be contacted to ensure their own safety by phone, text, or email as appropriate. • Employees will be contacted on their phone and/or by email to report to a modified work site if appropriate. • Staff in the unaffected areas will provide relief and reinforcement as needed to the affected areas and work under the direction of their specified manager or designee for the affected area as well as continuing to provide day-to-day case management for their on-going caseloads. • The restoration of child welfare services is prioritized and communicated to employees working during or after a disaster in the most expeditious manner possible. • The specific manager of the state or county or designee will determine the staff reporting stations based on direction from the DCFS Administrator or designee.
	<p><u>FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees will be contacted to ensure their safety by phone, text, or email as appropriate. • Employees will be contacted on their phone and/or by email to report to a modified work site if appropriate. • Staff in the unaffected areas will provide relief and reinforcement as needed to the affected areas and work under the direction of the DCFS Administrator or designee for the affected area.
Essential Function	Workload planning
Process Description:	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operations will return to regular work hours and functions as soon as possible. The priority for restoring services is as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hotline Services. ○ Investigations---ability to investigate reports of abuse and neglect and place children in safe out of home living arrangements if needed. ○ Ensure safety of children who are wards placed out of home care and focus on children with special needs and dependent on technology (i.e. wheelchairs, respirators, sight impaired, etc.). ○ Execute consents for children in our care (i.e., emergency surgery)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Payment to caregivers. ● As available and appropriate, supervisory staff will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide backup to line staff. ○ Report to their respective manager or designee at least once a day if not more frequently depending on the situation. ○ Make sure staff working in the disaster/emergency area are debriefed regularly. ○ Monitor extremely serious cases. ● Social workers/case workers will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide on-going case management for current caseloads; and, ● Respond to new cases on a prioritized basis with the assistance of workers from unaffected areas or other counties. ● Support staff can assist with many job functions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assist with phone calls to verify location of children or hotline coverage. ○ Assist with in person verification and location of children if phone lines are inoperable. ○ Assist in locating appropriate foster homes or facilities for emergency placements. ○ Assist in coordinating background checks for available emergency placements. ● See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021 <p><u>FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● FPO staff may assist affected areas and work under the direction of the DCFS Administrator or designee.
<p>Essential Function</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Alternative locations for operations</p>
<p>Process Description</p>	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The regions will communicate any alternate worksites to the DCFS Administrator or designee. ● See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021 <p><u>FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At the direction of the DCFS Administrator or designees, FPO managers and supervisors are responsible for directing their staff and communicating with them prior, during and after a disaster/emergency including directing them to alternative work sites.

Essential Function	Orientation and ongoing training/exercise
Process Description	<p><u>All State, County, and FPO Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training will be provided locally for practicing elements of the disaster plan including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conducting annual drills and documenting results. ○ Displaying evacuation routes and exits. ○ Knowledge of the location of fire alarms, fire extinguishers, etc. ○ Offering staff first aid and CPR. ○ Knowing the signs of stress and timeout related to emergencies. • See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021
CWS Disaster Response Criteria B:	Respond, as appropriate, to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster, and provide services in those cases
Essential Function	New child welfare investigation process
Process Description	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operations will continue per existing policy and procedures unless alternative state or federal guidance provided. • Alternate staff may be used to handle hotline calls, as needed. • Calls to the hotline or in person requests for services will be met in order of need (i.e. physical or life-threatening need first). • Staff that do not provide an essential function may be assigned to support roles in notifying families, transporting children, or other functions involved in the investigation process when safe and appropriate to do so. • See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021 <p><u>FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FPO staff will assist all offices as necessary and available to ensure services and functions are restored.
Essential Function	Implementation process for providing new services
Process Description	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operations will continue per existing policy and procedures unless alternative state or federal guidance provided. • Alternate staff may be used to handle hotline calls, as needed.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In calls to the hotline or in person requests for services will be met in order of need (i.e. physical or life-threatening need first). • The regions will prioritize their response and service delivery based upon the severity of needs and provide the plan to the DCFS Administrator or designee. • Staff that do not provide an essential function will be assigned to support roles in notifying families or transporting children or other functions involved in the investigation process. • See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021 <p><u>FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FPO staff may assist all offices as necessary and available to ensure services and functions are restored. • The DCFS Administrator or designee will work with the affected regions and/or state emergency services to assist in the restoration of services and functions in a rank order of importance and as quickly as possible.
<p>CWS Disaster Response Criteria C:</p>	<p>Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster</p>
<p>Essential Function</p>	<p>Communication with Child Welfare Personnel</p>
<p>Process Description</p>	<p><u>All State, County and FPO Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff in the field are to follow the safest course of action and then call in their location at the earliest time possible. • As soon as practical, the employee’s manager or designee will follow up to locate and communicate with personnel who have not been accounted for at the work site locations. • An all staff email will be sent with instruction and information updates for those with Internet access. • See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021
<p>Essential Function</p>	<p>Communication with Contracted Services</p>
<p>Process Description:</p>	<p><u>All State and County Offices:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatment providers and vendors will be contacted with further instructions if they have children in care. • Providers who provide mental health services may be called in to provide emergency crisis care.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prior to providing services, contractors provide an emergency plan which includes emergency contacts and organizational chart for their facility which are reviewed by licensing or funding agency to ensure communication processes are in place. <p>FPO Office:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the direction of the DCFS Administrator or designee, FPO staff may assist all offices in the communication with contracted vendors and providers.
Essential Function	Communication process when normal communications are unavailable
Process Description:	<p><u>All State, County and FPO Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The DCFS Administrator or designee will collaborate with the regions to assess any communication issues and develop a plan to address such issues. When communications are unavailable, each agency will rely on the DEM/EOC, the National Guard and/or the American Red Cross hotline numbers for communication. <p>See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021</p>
Essential Function	Communication with Media
Process Description	<p><u>All State, County and FPO Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Information officer for all division directors will collaborate to deliver public messages to media. Staff are not to discuss activities with individuals working in the media and are advised to direct them to the DHHS Director or the Public Information Officer (PIO).
CWS Disaster Response Criteria D:	Preserve Essential Program Records
Essential Function	Record preservation process
Process Description	<p><u>All State, County and FPO Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During a disaster or emergency, the file room will be locked and monitored by file room staff as available. Staff will secure paper copy files in place or by bringing files to the file room maintaining as much security of confidential information as possible.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program records (license files, medical information, case notes, legal documents, forms) and related information are maintained electronically in the Statewide Child Welfare Information System (UNITY).
Essential Function	Use of off-site back up system
Process Description	<p><u>All State, County and FPO Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child welfare data is backed up at the State IT Department and locally daily. Program records (license files, medical information, case notes, legal documents, forms) and related information are maintained electronically in the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (UNITY). The disaster plan is coordinated with IMS so that electronic information is preserved and available in case of electrical outage, destruction of property, etc.
CWS Disaster Response Criteria E:	Coordinate services and share information with other states
Essential Function	Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children reporting process
Process Description	<p><u>FPO Office:</u> Nevada Deputy Compact Administrator (DCA) or designee will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify children in the geographic area affected by the disaster or emergency. Contact the local office responsible for the supervision of the child's placement. Obtain information about the child's location and condition. Notify the sending state's DCA about the child's location and condition. Document any collected information on paper forms (if NIECE is unavailable) about the child and send it to the sending state's DCA when phone service or other services are restored. In the event an agency which provides child welfare services is unable to continue to provide services to children in their custody due to being overwhelmed by a disaster or emergency, the DCFS Administrator or designee will work with the affected counties and/or state emergency services to assist in the location of children in county custody located out of state. See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021

Essential Function	Mental Health Providers
Process Description	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical services may be provided as available from DCFS Children’s Mental Health and/or the Division of Public and Behavioral Health. • See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021 <p><u>FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available FPO staff may assist all offices affected by a disaster/emergency with locating mental health services for children as needed. • In the event an agency which provides child welfare services is unable to continue to provide services to children in their custody due to being overwhelmed by a disaster or emergency, the DCFS Administrator or designee will work with the affected counties and/or state emergency services to assist in the location of necessary mental health services.
Essential Function	Courts
Process Description:	<p><u>All State and County Offices and FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DCFS Administrator or designee will collaborate and coordinate with Court Improvement Program of needed revisions to judicial processes. • See COVID-19 Response Disaster Plan Update 2021
Essential Function	Federal Partners
Process Description	<p><u>All State and County Offices and FPO Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DCFS Administrator or designee will interact with federal partners as necessary to ensure updates regarding the status of State children and programs in areas affected by a disaster/emergency.
Essential Function	Tribes
Process Description	<p><u>All State and County Offices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tribes in all counties of Nevada are sovereign nations who work with Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) staff and Bureau of the Interior (BOI). • Any ICWA children in placement will have available the same services as any other child. • Tribes will be contacted if they are identified as the guardian of the child or if a child has been placed on tribal land through an established MOU. <p><u>FPO Office</u></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The DCFS FPO ICWA Specialist or designee will maintain contact with the Tribes as appropriate and necessary.• The DCFS FPO ICWA Specialist or designee will assist with ICWA cases as appropriate.
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COVID-19 RESPONSE DISASTER PLAN UPDATE 2021

In March of 2020, the Disaster Plan had to be utilized to take required actions to effectively respond to the national health emergency designated by the national government to be the COVID-19 pandemic. Modifications had to be made to the existing disaster plan to incorporate a state response concerning the impact of a global pandemic of this scale. The pandemic impacted several key operations regarding child welfare in the State of Nevada. The modifications were instituted to maintain services to the children and families within our state. It should be noted that at the time of this update many state agencies have either remained closed with work from home directive procedures being utilized or gradually resumed limited operations with a progressive plan outlined by Nevada Governor Sisolak's Road to Recovery directiveⁱ to slowly reopen offices. Due to the unique aspects of the national health emergency and the volume of guidance provided to child welfare agencies, this update is specific to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has caused enormous economic strains and nationwide shortages of vital resources that effected staff being able to safely perform their jobs. Initially there were nationwide shortages of soap, sanitizers, gloves, medical masks, and other various forms of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). This greatly impacted our direct service staff, especially those in the field. This compromised the safety and security of not just child welfare workers but the numerous children and families that we serve on a day-to-day basis. All state, county and local jurisdiction agencies were dramatically impacted. Employees designated as "non-essential" were transitioned to telecommuting so that the continuity of government services could continue while at the same time helping mitigate the spread of the disease.ⁱⁱ While there were struggles with the capacity to support staff in transitioning to telecommuting, the agencies prioritized remote access to systems based upon staff essential functions and safety of children. Some essential staff continued to work from offices to provide critical services such as hotline and investigations.

Nevada COVID Timeline:

March 11, 2020 - The World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared a global emergency classified as a global pandemic in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.ⁱⁱⁱ A pandemic by definition is an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population.^{iv}

March 12, 2020 - Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak issued a Declaration of Emergency^v in response of the global infectious disease pandemic designated by the National Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as COVID-19. COVID-19 is a highly infectious coronavirus that aggressively attacks the respiratory system of its victims. The virus is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about six (6) feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It also may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, face, or eyes.^{vi}

March 13, 2020 – The President of the United States declared a national emergency in response to the escalating crisis.^{vii}

March 15, 2020 - Governor Sisolak orders the close of state offices and staff are to transition working from home whenever possible to mitigate the spread of the virus.

March 17, 2020 - Governor Sisolak ordered statewide closure of all gaming casinos and entities to help contain the virus. These were unprecedented steps that Nevada was initiating. This was a rapidly evolving emergency that had never been faced on this scale.^{viii}

March 27, 2020 - The Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act for supplemental funding was signed into law. This funding is specifically designed to provide flexibility in how agencies can prevent, prepare for, and respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency while continuing to address the needs of children and families within their communities.^{ix}

The State of Nevada has since distributed the CARES funding throughout the state to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring that vital child welfare services continue to be provided in a safe manner in conjunction with continuing to prevent removals, maintain safe placements and continue to reunify youth with their parents.

Services CARES Act funds have been utilized in the following capacity:

- Provide financial emergency assistance to families who have been adversely affected by the pandemic. This includes assistance to provide for the youth in their care and/or stabilize the family unit. Emergency Assistance may include such items as rent, utilities, groceries, baby food, baby formula, diapers, daycare, bus passes, emergency respite, clothing, furniture, safety items including car seats, etc.; or any small immediate need to the family as a direct result of COVID-19 that serves to maintain the safety and stability of the youth in the Child Welfare System.
- Provide items of operation for the immediate and continuous safety measures necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Such items may include, but are not limited to, PPE, sanitization services, contracted medical/nursing services, small items of medical need, and items to promote social distancing such as small IT peripherals and small activities/activity items.
- provide Home based crisis intervention, home management skills, employment, and training activities

April 1, 2020 - Governor Sisolak issues a stay-at-home order, urging Nevadans to shelter in place to protect citizens while at the same time mitigating the spread of the virus.

April 4, 2020 – The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approves a major disaster declaration for the State of Nevada.

May 9, 2020 - Governor Sisolak advised that Nevada is currently in Phase One of reopening.

May 11, 2020 - Governor Sisolak declares a fiscal state of emergency for Nevada.

May 29, 2020 - Nevada transitions into Phase Two of reopening.

August 3, 2020 - Governor Sisolak and the Nevada Health Response team unveiled a new long-term mitigation strategy for the State of Nevada to help provide predictability and stability moving forward. The Road to Recovery Plan was developed recognizing that the State of Nevada and the nation are still in a response mode to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be for the foreseeable future.^x

October 30, 2020 - Governor Sisolak announces a statewide vaccine distribution program that will start with healthcare workers and vulnerable populations first when the vaccine is made available.

December 14, 2020 - Limited COVID-19 vaccines begin to be administered throughout the state.

December 27, 2020 - The President of the United States signs the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, P.L. 116-260, into law. Division X starts to provide temporary flexibilities and assistance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency. The temporary Title IV-E requirements and additional Chafee/ETV funding create the needed flexibilities required to address the critical financial needs of youth and young adults who are or were formerly in foster care. This provides an extended blanket of services to protect this targeted, at risk percentage of the population.

January 1, 2021 - All State agencies including DCFS start a mandatory furlough program. All state staff are instructed to have one eight-hour furlough day every month in response to the fiscal impacts of the pandemic.

February 3, 2021 - The Nevada Health Response sets up vaccine Q&A hotline.

February 10, 2021 - Average daily nationwide COVID-19 hospitalizations dip below 80,000 for first time since November of 2020.

February 16, 2021 - Governor Sisolak announces he will gradually start lifting coronavirus restrictions over a three-month period.

April 5, 2021 - Governor Sisolak advises that vaccinations are now open to everyone in Nevada ages 16 and older without restrictions.

April 13, 2021 - Governor Sisolak held a press conference in which he discussed vaccination information and the State's current reopening plan. He advised that as of April 13th, 40% of Nevadans (age 16 and older) had started the vaccine process and 25% of Nevadans (age 16 and older) are fully vaccinated.^{xi}

The current state of Nevada Child Welfare operations:

As of October of 2020, approximately 70% of the state's child welfare operations have returned to in-person expectations regarding child welfare contacts by workers and family visitations. The remaining areas of the state continue to be a mixture of in person and virtual, dependent on the case dynamics and infection rates in specific areas. Parent contacts continue to also be a mix of both in-person and virtual.

Offices that are allowing visitations of any type are continuing to follow sanitary guidelines with mandatory masks, sanitizer, and cleanings between contacts. All visit types in the community continue to practice social distancing and mask regulations for the safety of all parties involved.

Most of the state continues to carry out most of their court proceedings, regardless of type on a virtual basis with the families. This continues to be judicial jurisdictional discretion per area of the state.

This plan continues to evolve in relation to COVID infection rates and vaccinations have now been approved by the CDC to also include children 12 years of age and up. Progress continues to be made on the reopening of state and local offices and businesses. While no major roadblocks to recovery have been seen to date, most jurisdictions do inevitably expect to see some issues as the transitions occur. This is factored in as staff will be dealing with childcare for their own families as well as how various school districts throughout the state work to return to normal in-person educational procedures.

The Governor transitioned most mitigation measures (with the exception of the statewide mask mandate) from State control to county control as of May 1, 2021. Most Nevada counties eliminated building capacity as of May 1, and some counties modified social distancing requirements from six feet to three feet. County mitigation measures continue to be taken into consideration when determining office capacity and in-person services. Mask requirements will continue to be mandatory until deemed no longer necessary by state directives.

While the majority of the DCFS Family Programs Office has been on 100% telecommuting schedules, pursuant to the Governor's guidance to return to normal operations as of June 1st, 2021, all Family Programs Office (FPO) staff will return to the office at least part time (e.g., 2-3 days per week). This will remain in effect for the foreseeable future.

Nevada entered a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) on November 1, 2019. On May 8, 2020, the Children's Bureau approved a Revised Measurement Plan for a one quarter extension for case reviews due to the national COVID-19 emergency. As a result of COVID-19, the state is continuing to work collaboratively with its regional partners and the Children's Bureau to conduct virtual case reviews.

The existing disaster plan did not specifically address a global pandemic. Based on the magnitude of the crisis and the communicable nature of COVID-19 specific containment steps had to be updated and incorporated into the plan. The following table reflects the updates and additions as of May 27, 2021 to the disaster plan to meet the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. In the upcoming year,

the state will continue to assess the impact of the pandemic and make any additional modifications to the disaster plan, as necessary.

CWS Disaster Response Criteria A:	Identify, locate, and continue availability of services, including a plan for providing temporary shelter for children under State care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster
Essential Function	Identification and location process of children who may be displaced
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child welfare agencies have an obligation to ascertain the status of youth in court jurisdiction or independent living programs that may be affected due to closures of college campuses or disruption to other placement situations.^{xii} • Guidance was issued concerning PL 116^{xiii} • In compliance with PL 116 Nevada initiated a public awareness campaign noticing the opportunity to re-enter into foster care and/or receive additional support services.^{xiv}
Essential Function	Communication process with Caregivers/Foster Homes
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure parents, caregivers and youth have access to technology such as cell phones, tablets, or computers with internet access to participate in caseworker contacts and maintain important familial connections.^{xv}
Essential Function	Identification of evacuation procedures
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No updates
Essential Function	Parental notification procedures
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Resource Guide available to be given to parents, if appropriate to do so.^{xvi} • Connect families to needed assistance or resources.^{xvii}
Essential Function	Alternative processes for providing continued services
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Bureau urges child welfare agencies to be in touch with their governor and to work with emergency management and public health leadership to have child welfare workers and service providers classified as Level 1 emergency responders.^{xviii}

- Local jurisdictions encouraged to consult their legal counsel. In order for DCFS to track jurisdictional modifications to current practice through this crisis, FPO requests copies of all policies, procedures, instructional memoranda, or other communications to CW staff, and requests jurisdiction permission to share modified operations with other jurisdictions to facilitate practice improvement.^{xix}
- Local jurisdictions encouraged to connect with Public Health Preparedness Team to coordinate with State of Nevada Emergency Operations Center for resources and contact FPO with statutory, regulatory or policy concerns or deviations.^{xx}
- State offices closed to the public and in-person public services transitioned to services online and over the phone.^{xxi}
- Section 424(f)(2)(A) of the Act requires that each state must ensure that not less than 50 percent of the total number of monthly caseworker visits during a federal fiscal year occur in the residence of the child. The Children’s Bureau identified that during the major disaster period, the Title IV-E agency may include the monthly caseworker visits that occur by means of videoconferencing as “in the child’s residence” for meeting the requirement in §424(f)(2)(A) of the Act.^{xxii}
- The monthly caseworker visit requirement remains in place, but policy is modified to permit such visits to be conducted by videoconferencing in these extraordinary circumstances.^{xxiii} When deemed safe the visits will then need to return to normal expectations.
- Staff are to wear masks and other PPE as necessary and available during home visits. Any video-based meetings will be documented in the UNITY system with explanations why they were carried out in this manner. ^{xxiv}
- When in person contact is required, utilize screening questions prior to visits. Staff should use social distancing and stay six feet away from all individuals when possible, refrain from touching anything in the home, and use PPE. Consider talking to family members outside to minimize time spent inside the home.^{xxv}
- In response to the COVID-19 emergency, the Nevada Division of Child and Family Services will take an approach to maximize safety while minimizing service disruption. Accomplish this by: 1) Maximizing Telehealth, 2) Minimize office exposure by maximizing telecommuting and staggering shifts when necessary, 3) Monitor facility staff at five state facilities, 4) Keep communication lines open with community providers to assist as needed, 5) Create easy ways for staff to report concerns, request COVID-related leave or flexibility requests, and 6) Use online collaboration tools to continue to make progress on systems improvement.^{xxvi}

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every effort should be made to incorporate phone or video-conferencing visits if in-person family visits are not feasible or safe. Cases should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. • Community Mental Health Services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expanded telehealth delivery utilizing various platforms. Most Medical services can be delivered via telehealth except for Psychosocial Rehabilitation (PSR), Basic Skills Training (BST), Group therapy, Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy and medical services which require direct contact with the patient. Telehealth should be utilized when possible to minimize the risk of both patients and providers.^{xxvii} ○ Mobile Crisis shifted to telehealth services in most circumstances, or face-to-face abiding by CDC guidance and utilization of PPE.^{xxviii} • Residential Mental Health Services.^{xxix} <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In-person visits for youth in the programs suspended with increased options for video or telephonic visits. ○ Teletherapy was instituted and school delivered remotely. <p>Guidance was issued concerning PL 116 as related to the prevention of youth aging out of foster care and to facilitate re-entry into foster care. The guidance also outlined temporary increases in service provision to youth over the age of 18.^{xxx}</p>
Essential Function	Staff assignment process
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No update
Essential Function	Workload planning
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies may utilize federal funds for purchasing cell phones and PPE.^{xxxi} • During the major disaster period, the Title IV-E agency may include the monthly caseworker visits that occur by means of videoconferencing as “in the child’s residence” for meeting the requirement of the Stafford Flexibility Act.^{xxxii}
Essential Function	Alternative locations for operations
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nevada Governor ordered no congregating in public places, extend declarations of emergency, and issued a stay-at-home order.^{xxxiii}

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following White House opening guidelines, return to work in phases, encourage telework, close common areas, minimize non-essential travel and schools may remained closed.^{xxxiv} • Maximize telecommuting to minimize office exposure and utilize staggered shifts when necessary.^{xxxv}
Essential Function	Orientation and ongoing training/exercise
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide resources for employees’ behavioral health^{xxxvi} and ways to manage stress.^{xxxvii} • While working through the immediate crisis, begin planning for recovery and identifying lessons learned for enhanced planning and preparedness for future disasters. Agencies encouraged to plan for potential lingering negative budgetary effects on the agency.^{xxxviii} • Use online collaboration tools to continue to make progress on systems improvement for Nevada’s future.^{xxxix} • Provide resources to parents on how to talk to children, offered by the Nevada Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) website. • Make available to employees, information about and tips for social distancing, quarantine, and isolation.^{xl}
CWS Disaster Response Criteria B:	Respond, as appropriate, to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster, and provide services in those cases
Essential Function	New child welfare investigation process
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Bureau advised that states would be left to determine their own protocols so long as the guidelines are met.^{xli} • Initial face to face contact with children and families to assess for safety by the assigned investigating staff must continue with no deviation from the in-person requirements but response times were adjusted as follows:^{xlii} <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ P1 – Modified to 6-hour response time. ○ P2 – No change and stands at 24-hour response time. ○ P3 – Modified to 7 calendar days. • Face-to-face contact should utilize CDC guidelines and PPE to risk to all parties.^{xliii} • For required home visits, staff should call the family before going to the home and use screening questions.^{xliv}

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every effort should be made to incorporate phone or video-conferencing visits if in-person family visits are not feasible or safe. Cases should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. • The Children’s Bureau, using the Stafford Flexibility Act,^{xlv} identified modifications to the fingerprint-based criminal record check requirements of §471(a)(20)(A), (C), and (D) of the Social Security Act. During the major disaster period, a Title IV-E agency that wishes to exercise this flexibility must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conduct all available name-based criminal background checks for prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, legal guardians, and adults working in childcare institutions, and ○ Complete the fingerprint-based checks of NCID pursuant to §471(a)(20)(A), (C), and (D) of the Act as soon as it can safely do so, in situations where only name-based checks were completed.
Essential Function	Implementation process for providing new services
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face contact should adhere to CDC guidelines and PPE to reduce risk to all parties.^{xlvi} • Every effort should be made to incorporate phone or video-conferencing visits if in-person family visits are not feasible or safe. Cases should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
WS Disaster Response Criteria C:	Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster
Essential Function	Communication Structure: Child Welfare Personnel
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To track jurisdictional modifications to current practice through this crisis, the DCFS FPO requests copies of all policies, procedures, instructional memoranda, or other communications to child welfare staff, and requests jurisdiction permission to share modified operations with the other jurisdictions to facilitate practice improvement.^{xlvii}
Essential Function	Communication Structure: Contracted Services
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Updates
Essential Function	Communication process when normal communications are unavailable

Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with supervisor via email or phone pertaining to any needed modifications to standard policy and procedure.^{xlviii}
Essential Function	Communication with media
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Updates
CWS Disaster Response Criteria D:	Preserve Essential Program Records
Essential Function	Record preservation process
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Updates
Essential Function	Use of off-site back up system
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Updates
CWS Disaster Response Criteria E:	Coordinate services and share information with other states
Essential Function	Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children reporting process
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Association of Administrators for the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children provides information on individual state travel restrictions. Implemented changes to monthly visitation of children per state and federal guidance including allowing for virtual visitation.^{xlix} ICPC travel not suspended and regions requested to continue with ICPC activities provided the partnering states are cooperating and the activities are in the best interest of the child.ⁱ <p>Home studies may still be completed in person using proper hygiene and social distancing.ⁱⁱ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nevada ICPC issued PL 116-260 (Division X) guidance requesting jurisdictions to keep cases open to ensure that youth over the age of 18 continue to receive supportive services in coordination with the sending state.

Essential Function	Courts
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child welfare workers to attend child welfare court proceedings via in-person, videoconference, and/or telephonically. ⁱⁱⁱ This is a judicial decision that continues to be decided at the judicial jurisdictional level. • Court Improvement Programs (CIPs) across the country provide critical support for efforts to ensure children’s safety and well-being, and to protect constitutional rights. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Purchasing technology to allow hearings to continue remotely. ○ Working to develop protocols for remote hearings. ○ Providing remote training to judges, court administrators and clerks on how best to use technology platforms. ○ Coordinating COVID-19 responses with child welfare agencies. ○ Providing remote training to attorneys for children, parents, and the child welfare agency on how best to use technology platforms to communicate with their clients and participate in hearings and reviews. • Working to develop or improve e-filing systems. ^{liii}
Essential Function	Tribes
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Updates

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- ⁱⁱⁱ World Health Organization. (2020). *Rolling updates on coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>
- ^{iv} Merriam-Webster. (2020). *Dictionary Pandemic*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pandemic>
- ^v Sisolak, Steve. State of Nevada Executive Department. (March 22, 2020). *Declaration of Emergency Directive 006*. Nevada.
- ^{vi} Clark County (March 13, 2020). *Guide to Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)*. Nevada.
- ^{vii} Trump, Donald J. The White House. *Proclamation on Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-declaring-national-emergency-concerning-novel-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak/>
- ^{viii} Sisolak, Steve. State of Nevada Executive Department. (March 18, 2020). *Declaration of Emergency Directive 003*. Nevada.
- ^{ix} State of Nevada (July 13, 2020). *Nevada Cares Act Overview*. Nevada
- ^x State of Nevada (August 3, 2020) *Road To Recovery: Moving to a New Normal*. Nevada
- ^{xi} State of Nevada (April 19, 2021) *DCFS COVID-19 Recovery Group Update*. Nevada
- ^{xii} Armstrong, Ross. Division of Child and Family Services. (March 17, 2020). *Instructional Memo: COVID-19 Guidance Memo #1*. Nevada.
- ^{xiii} Roose, Kathryn. Division of Child and Family Services. (April 2, 2021). *Guidance and Instruction related to the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act, Division X of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 Public Law 116-260, enacted December 27, 2020*. Nevada.
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- ^{xvi} Cortez Masto, Catherine. United States Senate. (2020). *Covid-19 Resource Guide*. Nevada.
- ^{xvii} Armstrong, Ross. Division of Child and Family Services. (March 17, 2020). *Instructional Memo: COVID-19 Guidance Memo #1*. Nevada.
- ^{xviii} Milner, Jerry. Administration for Children and Families. (April 17, 2020). *Letter to child welfare leaders*. Washington, D.C.
- ^{xix} Armstrong, Ross. Division of Child and Family Services. (March 17, 2020). *Instructional Memo: COVID-19 Guidance Memo #1*. Nevada.
- ^{xx} Armstrong, Ross. Division of Child and Family Services. (March 17, 2020). *Instructional Memo: COVID-19 Guidance Memo #1*. Nevada.
- ^{xxi} Sisolak, Steve. State of Nevada Executive Department. (March 18, 2020). *Declaration of Emergency Directive 006*. Nevada.
- ^{xxii} Milner, Jerry. Administration for Children and Families. (April 15, 2020). *Letter to child welfare leaders*. Washington, D.C.
- ^{xxiii} Milner, Jerry. Administration for Children and Families. (March 18, 2020). *COVID-19 letter to child welfare leaders*. Washington, D.C.
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