


## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** All Behavioral HealthChoices Managed Care Organizations (BH-MCO), Fee-For-Service (FFS) Providers, and County Mental Health Authorities – Statewide

**FROM:** Kristen Houser  
Deputy Secretary   
Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS)

**RE:** OMHSAS Behavioral Health Services in Counties Moving from RED Phase to YELLOW Phase

**DATE:** May 22, 2020

### **PURPOSE:**

On May 1, 2020, [Governor Wolf](#) announced that 24 counties from the northwest and northcentral regions of Pennsylvania would be moving from RED phase to YELLOW phase beginning on Friday, May 8, 2020. Additional counties have been added weekly as part of the Wolf administration's process to reopen Pennsylvania. A up to date listing of counties and their status can be found [here](#). The transition of a county's status from RED phase to YELLOW phase allows for limited reopening of some businesses, while maintaining aggressive COVID-19 mitigation efforts; the [Process to Reopen Pennsylvania](#) provides guidelines for each color designation.

### **OMHSAS Services in Counties the Governor Declares in the Yellow Phase:**

Moving from the RED phase to the YELLOW phase does not change any guidance that has been issued by OMHSAS. All conditions outlined in the guidance noted below continues to apply to OMHSAS' programs and services.

### **Telehealth:**

Telehealth continues to be the preferred method for delivering behavioral health services during the YELLOW phase. OMHSAS Guidance on telehealth during COVID-19 is located at the following links:

- [Telehealth Guidelines Related to COVID-19 \(Updated\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) Supplement 1](#)

## **Residential Settings:**

- Residential settings should continue to follow all guidance issued by the [CDC](#) and the [PA Department of Health](#) for staff and resident screening and infection controls.
- COVID-19 Visitation Guidelines for Long-Term Structured Residences (LTSR), Community Residential Rehabilitation (CRR) Services, Residential Treatment Facilities for Adults (RTF-A) and Crisis Residences can be found [here](#).

OMHSAS recommends providers consider the following actions as the use of masks is required for all individuals receiving behavioral healthcare services who are able to tolerate without enduring overwhelming reactions related to anxiety and trauma. Service providers can help individuals with the use of masks and lessen the possibility of an overwhelming reaction by doing the following:

- Provide individuals with information about the masking guidelines and an explanation of why masks are important to protecting the health and safety of everyone before any in-person meetings.
- Ask individuals (via telephone or in writing) if they have concerns about the use of masks for themselves or by the professionals with whom they will interact, and document so that all providers will have notice if it is unsafe to interact prior to masking.
- Provide individuals with options as well as pros and cons of those options including the use of telehealth, delaying services, etc.
- Advise the individual if you will be wearing a mask before meeting them.
- When approaching someone while wearing PPE, do not rush. Do discuss the fact that you are wearing PPE and acknowledge it may feel weird or uncomfortable to the individual; ask if they are OK with it; make sure they can hear your voice clearly; use a tone that is welcoming and open to feedback.
- If possible, select or personalize PPE in a way that makes it less threatening. For instance, add decorative or pleasant images, wear a sticker with a full-face photo of yourself while smiling. Do not use PPE that might be more suited to Halloween, be perceived as scary, political or provocative.

- Allow children or others with fears to choose from options when possible – for example, let the individual choose the color of mask they or their provider will wear. (Please remember that masks or cloth face coverings should not be used by children under the age of two.)
- While the face or body is covered in PPE, provide more vocal and verbal cues about what is happening or going to happen, so there is more information to make up for the lack of nonverbal cues.
- Make sure masks on kids are not painful, too tight, hurting their ears, etc.

Care providers should consider making necessary changes to office procedures and layout to enable compliance with social distancing standards. Points for consideration include:

- Restrict waiting room access to individuals with appointments only, unless caregiver assistance is needed.
- Where available, an individual can register and wait for their appointment in their car.
- Waiting rooms are set up to follow social distancing guidelines – this may require the removal or relocation of furniture to ensure people cannot sit in close proximity to staff in the reception area or to each other.
- Surfaces in waiting rooms and doorways are actively disinfected and cleaned multiple times throughout the day.
- Hand sanitizer is available, and its use is encouraged for individuals in waiting rooms.
- Masks are required for anyone entering or working in the office/facility.

This and additional information can be found on the [CDC website](#).



Providers are encouraged to continue to monitor the [Department of Health \(DOH\) COVID-19 website](#) for the most up-to-date DOH guidance on COVID-19, the [Department of Human Services \(DHS\) COVID-19 website](#) for the most up-to-date DHS guidance on COVID-19, and [Governor Wolf's website](#) for responding to COVID-19 in Pennsylvania.

OMHSAS will continue to evaluate the steps necessary to address the Governor's plan to reopen PA and communicate updated guidance as needed.

OMHSAS COVID-19 related inquiries can be sent to [ra-pwomhsascovid-19@pa.gov](mailto:ra-pwomhsascovid-19@pa.gov).