

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Department of Human Services Releases COVID-19 Operational Recommendations, Telehealth Guidelines for Behavioral Health Services

Harrisburg, PA – The Department of Human Services’ (DHS) Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) today released [operational recommendations](#) and [telehealth guidelines](#) for providers of behavioral health services.

“The Wolf administration is committed to serving vulnerable populations every day, and that commitment will not waiver in the face of an emergency,” said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. “We are working with county mental health programs and behavioral health service providers to be sure that behavioral health services for Pennsylvanians continue uninterrupted.”

OMHSAS has developed the following operational recommendations, which will be updated and re-released on a recurring basis as new information becomes available. Recommendations include:

- Exercise and promote hygienic practices;
- Review agency emergency preparedness plan and infection control procedures;
- Report all suspected cases of COVID-19 to OMHSAS;
- Contact OMHSAS before making any changes to your business practice whenever possible. Examples of changes in business practices include, but are not limited to;
 - Suspending services at a service location or temporarily closing programs.
 - Closing county offices.
- Document what actions were taken and maintain evidence for why actions were taken.
- Stay Informed via the [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

OMHSAS has also temporarily suspended certain requirements for providing behavioral health services via telehealth. Changes to existing telehealth regulations include:

- Staff may deliver telehealth services via telephonic and video communication applications such as FaceTime or Skype available on smart phones, and through telephonic only devices when video technology is not available;
- Telehealth services may be provided in the home and without provider staff being physically present with the individual receiving services;
- Practitioner types who can provide telehealth services is expanded beyond what is typically permitted;



- Both Behavioral HealthChoices and fee-for-service providers may bill for telehealth;
- Typical face-to-face contact percentages may be met with use of telehealth;
- Programmatic limits for the amount of service that may be provided through telehealth are temporarily suspended.

For more information on existing telehealth behavioral health guidance in Pennsylvania, refer to [this bulletin](#).

DHS has already released operational recommendations for providers of [child welfare services](#), [intellectual disability and autism services](#), and [long-term services and supports](#) in Pennsylvania in response to COVID-19. DHS program offices are continuing to formulate recommendations for other provider communities and will publish guidance as it becomes available.

Visit the PA Department of Health's dedicated [Coronavirus webpage](#) for the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19.

If you are experiencing anxiety or stress related to COVID-19, advice on how to manage this is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [here](#).

Guidance to DHS providers related to COVID-19 is available [here](#).

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