



# COVID-19 –Frequently asked questions

For DCJ-funded DFV services

## Issue 1: April 2020

This document has been drafted to respond to specific questions raised by NSW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) services delivering accommodation assistance and other supports to during the COVID-19 crisis.

Advice responding to questions regarding public health directions is the responsibility of NSW Health and may change quickly as the situation evolves. For this reason, links to information on the NSW Health website have been provided wherever there is relevant advice that answers the question. Please note, as NSW health continually updates these links, this information is also subject to change.

*This document is current as at April 2020 and further issues are anticipated to update this information and respond to new questions as they emerge. Please note that the advice contained within this document may not be the most up-to-date advice post publication. Please check for the latest issue for the most up-to-date information.*

**This document has been prepared by DCJ Housing and Homelessness.**

**DCJ Child and Family and Women's NSW have been consulted in the development of the document.**

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# How does a public health pandemic affect the occurrence of DFV?

Research has shown social isolation is a known risk for domestic and family violence (DFV) and a strategy used by many people who use violence. With advice currently focusing on self-isolation and social distancing to manage the spread of COVID-19, many women and their children are at greater risk of experiencing DFV in their home.

DFV services and refuges are considered essential services that are to remain open during the pandemic.

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) is monitoring calls to the DVLine and Link2home, and undertaking a “service health check” of DFV services, to understand change in demand and make changes including providing required resources where needed to ensure the continued safety and wellbeing of clients and staff.

## Maintaining essential services

### Are DFV services required to continue operating?

Yes, DFV services for women with or without children are essential and will continue operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes residential, accommodation and support services.

Programs including Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV), Integrated Domestic & Family Violence Services (IDFVS) and Domestic Violence Response Enhancement (DVRE) provide important support to women experiencing DFV, even more so now as DFV occurrences are likely to increase as a result of measures being implemented to address COVID-19 - such as self-isolation and social distancing.

DCJ recognises that clients’ situations and needs are increasing in complexity and is considering how case management services may need to adapt to reflect the challenges of COVID-19. Service providers seeking to raise ideas and issues in relation to COVID-19 can do so through their organisation’s DCJ contract manager.

### Does capacity at the service need to reduce to 2 people?

As DFV services are essential, the group gathering of no more than two people is not applicable, however where possible the four square metre rule per person and social distancing should be observed. This advice will be updated as needed, in line with any changes introduced by the NSW Government.

### Is extra assistance available to my service during the pandemic period?

Service provider staff that are employed without an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or similar service in place have free access to DCJ’s EAP that is available to DCJ staff. The program is delivered by an independent organisation with a specialised team of psychologists and counsellors available 24/7. Services include:

- General counselling
- Career Assist
- Conflict Assist
- Nutrition and Lifestyle
- Money Assist
- Family Assist
- Manager Assist
- Legal Assist.

To register your organisation for these services, or for further information email:  
[qualityandpracticeprojects@facs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:qualityandpracticeprojects@facs.nsw.gov.au).

The Australian Government has committed an additional \$150 million to support people experiencing DFV. The allocation of Commonwealth funding amongst jurisdictions is being determined by the Commonwealth.

### How do I ensure my service can continue to provide essential support?

The continuation of DFV services is crucial to many vulnerable people. Should your service be required to scale back service delivery or close for COVID-19 impacts please notify your local DCJ contract manager as soon as possible to ensure arrangements are put in place for clients to continue receiving support.

Where feasible, it is anticipated that DFV providers will deliver services remotely via web chat or video calls. TechSafety provides information on [how to operate as a remote workplace during a public health crisis](#) and continue to support women experiencing DFV. This page includes a link to practicing self-care that can be shared with staff including those that may be at risk of experiencing vicarious trauma working remotely, to ensure the mental wellbeing of staff during this time is also supported.

Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia offers a [one hour training module on Vicarious Trauma](#) that includes strategies with dealing with the impacts of vicarious trauma.

[SafeWork NSW](#) also has a number of resources and ideas to support staff mental health working through COVID-19.

### Do casual staff and redeployed office staff need to have working with children checks?

As a result of COVID 19, it is anticipated that services may have an increase in casual and or redeployed staff working in their organisation.

Whether casual or redeployed staff require working with children checks (WWCC) will depend on the type of work they will be undertaking and how frequently they come into contact with children and young people. If a staff member's role sees them working with young people under 18 years, where the work is face to face or online and where contact with the young person is a key component of the work being undertaken, then they will need a WWCC.

Refer to the [Office of the Children's Guardian website](#) for more information.

Staff being re-deployed in the sector should also have relevant training and expertise, with the ability to work in a trauma informed way, and provided with sufficient supervision as they may be at higher risk of experiencing vicarious trauma.

### Is there advice for service volunteers during COVID-19?

If your organisation uses volunteers, you can find information about the impact of COVID-19 and options for your service [here](#).

# Supporting women experiencing DFV during the COVID-19 pandemic period

## What are some key messages for DFV clients during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Key messaging provided by services should be drawn from trusted sources, consider any inherent risks to the victim-survivor, refer to established helplines such as 1800 RESPECT, the Domestic Violence Line and the Men's Referral Service. If there are concerns that a child is at risk of harm from abuse or neglect a report must be made to the Child Protection Helpline on 132 111.

Some key messages for clients are:

- DFV is not okay under any circumstances. You have the right to live free from violence.
- Children have the right to live safely with their families. Harm in the form of abuse or neglect, including witnessing violence, can have lasting and damaging effects.
- DFV is not just physical, it can also involve verbal, psychological, financial, physical or sexual abuse, harassment and stalking, spiritual or religious abuse, reproductive, technology-facilitated or image-based abuse. There are some abusive behaviours that may be unique to the pandemic.
- You do not have to stay or self-isolate in an unsafe home. There is alternative accommodation available for you and your children.
- If someone living with you has committed a crime against you, the Police can exclude that person from your home.
- You are allowed to leave your home if you feel unsafe, or in an emergency.

## Will additional accommodation options be available to women (and their children) experiencing DFV?

DCJ has implemented changes to temporary accommodation (TA) options as a result of COVID-19, including:

- For women and children escaping DFV an **initial 5 days** will be provided. Extensions will then be provided as needed on a case by case basis taking into account the client's circumstances.
- 14 nights in the first instance for those that have been advised by NSW Health to self-isolate. Clients do not need to provide evidence of this, staff should accept their advice or the advice of their support worker.
- 30 nights given to those that identify as sleeping rough.

Please contact your DCJ contract manager to discuss access to additional TA.

Also available to families escaping DFV placed in temporary accommodation during COVID-19, are cooked meals delivered by OzHarvest in conjunction with DCJ. Link2Home will coordinate the identification of the individuals, their dietary needs and location to provide to OzHarvest with a daily order for the supply and delivery of meals.

## What should I do if a client is in immediate danger during self-isolation?

If the client is in immediate danger or at serious risk please call 000 and advise Police.

## What should I do if a client is in foreseeable / potential danger during self-isolation?

If a client is in foreseeable / potential danger and required to self-isolate, it is recommended the client be referred to crisis or temporary accommodation.

Please contact Link2Home – (1800 152 152) available 24 / 7 days, for assistance with emergency temporary and crisis accommodation.

### How do I support DFV clients self-isolating that choose to remain at home that may be exposed to violence?

Should the client not be in danger of imminent harm and choose to remain in their home, please develop an individualised safety plan and consider alternative arrangements, such as video conferencing, for undertaking regular core services. This could be via Skype, FaceTime, another video platform or telephone.

Prior to making contact with a client that may be isolating with a perpetrator in the same house, undertake a risk assessment to determine the best method of communication to ensure clients' privacy and safety.

A safety plan is a tailored plan that includes ways for women that are not in immediate danger and their children to remain safe in their home. Please consider including the following to increase their safety during self-isolation:

- Ensure women know where to access essential items such as food, hygiene products etc.
- Where safe, maintenance of social connections online or over the phone.
- Identifying and moving to 'lower risk spaces', where there are ways to escape if needed and the woman can be seen or heard from the outside.
- Where possible, for there to be a phone charged and accessible at all times.
- Where possible, access to a 'safe' phone that is not being monitored.
- Calling the police on 000 if things escalate and there are safety concerns, and advising police if there are any COVID-19 concerns in the home.
- Letting trusted friends and neighbours know of the situation and developing a plan and visual signals for when help is needed.
- Having a bag ready to leave or important items easy to access if necessary.
- If applicable, teaching children how to call 000 for Police and to know their home address.
- If applicable, developing signals and/or code words that will let children know to get out and go to a pre-arranged place of safety.
- Referring women to the E-Safety Commissioner's 'online safety checklist' for steps that can be taken to increase personal safety and ensure the continued use of technology and connectivity while living with an abusive partner: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/domestic-family-violence/online-safety-planning/online-safety-checklist>.

Legal Aid NSW has also developed factsheets with information on '[Staying safe in the home](#)' and '[Planning to leave home safely](#)'.

Also, Police continue to have powers to exclude violent offenders from the home where an offence has occurred or an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order has been breached (see section below on 'Police Response' for more information).

### Why is a tailored response required for women with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Tailored responses for women with disabilities experiencing DFV are more important now than ever, as women may be in isolation with abusive family members and reliant on them for their care. As COVID-19 is affecting various services, it is possible women with disabilities may also not be able to access their usual safe-guarding supports.

Information for people with a disability can be found online at:

- <https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/covid-19-information-and-support-for-people-with-disability-and-carers>

- <https://www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus#coronavirus-information>
- <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-information>.

### Is respite care available for disabled children?

For clients needing respite care for their disabled children (which can include adult children), information can be found at <https://www.carergateway.gov.au/covid-19>

### Can COVID-19 support payments can be claimed?

Clients may be eligible to receive a support payment during the COVID-19 pandemic period in a number of circumstances including:

- not able to work or do not have work
- in isolation or hospitalised
- caring for children.

Sole traders who have lost more than 30% of their income may also be eligible for the “Jobkeeper” payment.

To determine eligibility refer to: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/affected-coronavirus-covid-19/if-you-need-payment-coronavirus-covid-19>.

Legal Aid NSW has also developed a [factsheet on Child Support and Family Payments](#) and [Dealing with Financial Stress](#).

## Supporting children during the COVID-19 pandemic

### What are some resources for discussing COVID-19 with children?

Resources to assist in talking to children about COVID-19 can be found [here](#).

Clients needing respite care for children can find information [here](#).

## Technology and online safety support

### What online resources are available to help keep women stay safe during COVID-19 self-isolation?

The E-Safety Commissioner website provides advice on how to create an online safety plan for women experiencing DFV and their children. An [online safety plan](#) can help women stay connected online and prevent abusers from locating their location through social media, and accessing their online accounts and devices.

WESENET’s [Women’s Technology Safety & Privacy Toolkit](#) is for women experiencing tech abuse to learn how they can increase their technology safety and privacy. This toolkit includes resource guides ranging from online privacy and safety tips to smartphone privacy and location safety information.



# Resources and support for Aboriginal communities on COVID-19

## What information and support is available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on COVID-19?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been identified as a vulnerable cohort group for COVID-19.

Information sources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on COVID-19 include:

- Aboriginal Health resources can be found on the [NSW Health](#) site, including information on protecting the community and Elders, Sorry Business, and staying connected.
- The [NSW Health website](#) is also providing updates, including recommendations to restrict non-essential travel in and out of remote Aboriginal Communities to help delay, minimise and prevent an outbreak of COVID-19.
- [Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet](#) is providing Aboriginal specific updates and information.
- [The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation \(NACCHO\)](#) are providing regular updates for their members and community, and the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW have a number of resources related to COVID-19 on its website.
- [AbSec](#) is providing information for Aboriginal communities during COVID-19.
- A [National Indigenous Advisory Group](#) has also been set up by the government to fast-track an emergency response plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Safety and infection control

### Do we need to give masks to everyone who enters our facility?

NSW Health advice states that face masks are not recommended for the general population. Only people with respiratory symptoms in isolation and health care workers caring for people with respiratory symptoms should wear a mask.<sup>1</sup> Up to date information can be found on the NSW Health website.

### How can I help protect clients / residents and myself?

There is currently no vaccine or treatment for people who are infected with COVID-19.

The best way to protect yourself and to prevent infections spreading is to follow advice from NSW Health, which includes washing your hands or use alcohol-based hand gel frequently – before and after touching people, linen, or surfaces touched by others.

If you develop any flu-like symptoms, you should self-isolate as you may infect clients and other staff, and seek medical advice.

If clients develop flu-like symptoms they should also self-isolate and seek medical advice. If staff or clients develop symptoms within 72 hours of being in physical contact, they should inform your service (see section below on 'Handling suspected or known cases of COVID-19' for more information).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-information-on-the-use-of-surgical-masks>

Ensure you receive the 2020 seasonal influenza vaccine as soon as it is offered by your organisation.

Many services are adjusting the way they deliver services to ensure safety of clients including Victim Services, whereby forms are now permitted to be returned via email (scan or photo) to prevent physical contact.

### What additional steps can we personally take to practice good hygiene?

Based on current Health advice, some simple measures to significantly reduce the risk of catching COVID-19 and of spreading it, including:

- [Practice good hand hygiene](#) by cleaning your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand rub/sanitiser.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing or use your elbow, not your hands.
- Avoid close contact with people unwell with cold or flu-like symptoms, and stay home if you have these symptoms, are sick or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19.
- Avoid touching your face and avoid shaking hands with others.
- Try to maintain a distance of 1.5 metres from others as much as possible, and avoid crowded places.
- Practice these yourself and encourage clients to do the same.

### What special measures should be put in place for staff and residents of related accommodation services?

In addition to steps you can personally take to practice good hygiene, measures can be put in place for staff and residents in accommodation services that can significantly reduce the risk of catching and spreading COVID-19 including:

- Supporting staff and residents to practice good hand and cough/sneeze hygiene, wash hands frequently; before and after touching residents, linen or surfaces touched by others.
- Avoid handshaking and other physical greetings.
- Regularly clean shared high-touch surfaces, such as telephones, tables, kitchen benches and doorknobs.
- Increase the amount of fresh air by opening windows or adjusting air conditioning.
- Where possible, buy more goods and services online to limit visits to the shop.

### How do I assist in the safety of my staff?

The most important thing you can do is follow NSW Health and NSW Government advice.

The SafeWork NSW website outlines measures an organisation should take to keep its employees safe, including:

- Having a plan in place.
- Promoting regular and thorough handwashing and good respiratory hygiene for staff and clients.
- Keeping work places clean, including additional cleaning and disinfection.
- Maintaining regular communication with staff.
- Ensuring staff do not attend work if they are ill.
- Reducing the number of staff on-site where possible.

### How do we manage the needs of particularly vulnerable staff members and maintain services as a result?

Measures need to be put in place to protect vulnerable staff or those caring for vulnerable people in order to continue to provide core services to clients. People considered to be particularly vulnerable include the following:

- People with compromised immune systems (such as people who have cancer).
- Elderly people.
- People with chronic medical conditions.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (as they have higher rates of chronic illness).

Services are encouraged to adopt some of the below measures to protect particularly vulnerable staff:

- Remove vulnerable staff from frontline roles and reallocate into roles in which they can work from home.
- Reallocate staff who are not considered particularly vulnerable into frontline roles.
- Avoid all face to face interactions and use technology and communication apps to ensure these staff can communicate with clients. This includes holding all meetings via videoconferencing or phone calls.
- Adapt service delivery to allow vulnerable staff to work with clients via phone, videoconferencing or email.

## Handling suspected or known cases of COVID–19

### What if there is COVID-19 incident in our facility?

In the event that your service needs to urgently react to a COVID-19 outbreak, follow NSW Health advice on isolation of an infected person. Notify all staff and clients who were in direct contact with that person. Please also notify your DCJ contract manager if there are any resulting service impacts.

### What is the procedure for accessing alternative accommodation?

Should there be a need to arrange urgent accommodation please contact:

- Link2Home – (1800 152 152) available 24 / 7 days, to assist with emergency temporary and crisis accommodation.

DCJ is also currently working on securing additional crisis and temporary accommodation options for people in need.

### What if a client with symptoms refuses to self-isolate?

In scenarios where there is refusal from a client who has tested positive to the virus to self-isolate, NSW Health and Police will consider their response on a case by case basis.

The National Coronavirus Health Information line can be contacted on 1800 020 080 for specific information.

Police are able to legally enforce a public health order on the advice of NSW Health. However, people should be supported within the service (or their home) if possible.

In complex and critical situations, where a centralised government response is required, contact your DCJ contract manager and advise the person's refusal is placing the community at risk.

Services are encouraged to update client agreements, asking clients to consent to be tested and to self-isolate where necessary.

DCJ is currently working to provide additional advice on how to manage these instances if or when they occur.

# NSW police response to DFV during the COVID-19 pandemic

## What happens if Police are required to remove a DFV offender who may have COVID-19 from their usual residence and that person has no accommodation options?

Where Police are required to remove a DFV offender with suspected or known COVID-19 from their usual residence to protect the safety of persons living in that home though has no other accommodation options, Police will assist the offender to contact Link2Home to arrange alternate accommodation.

Link2Home will assist to house the offender until the next business day, when the offender is able to either make contact with DCJ for further assistance or arrange their own accommodation, in consultation with DCJ.

Note NSW Police have access to a Health database with known cases of COVID19.

## Do Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders apply when self-isolating?

Yes. Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVO) compliance continues during self-isolation periods. NSW Police has uploaded a [video](#) to advise.

Further information from Legal Aid NSW on ADVOs during COVID-19 can be found [here](#).

# Court response & Legal matters relating to DFV during the COVID-19 pandemic

## What is the advice on Parenting Orders and COVID-19 from the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Circuit Court of Australia?

A media release statement from the Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia on Parenting Orders and COVID-19 can be found [here](#).

## If I have a matter in court, what should I do?

If you have a matter in court and you are not sure what you need to do or if you need to go to court, you can call the Legal Aid NSW Domestic Violence Unit on (02) 9219 6300 and speak to one of their lawyers for advice.

Legal Aid NSW has also developed a [factsheet on remote mediation](#).

NSW Local Court operational changes to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 can be found [here](#).

# Further information & Helplines

## Where can I find further COVID-19 information?

DCJ has developed a [COVID-19 website](#) that is regularly being updated, with information on all essential services including specific information for service providers.

[NSW Health](#) is also providing current COVID-19 information including statistics and [Public Health Orders](#).

The [nsw.gov.au website](#) is the best place for advice on all other Government services.

For COVID-19 information in different languages, please refer to resources available [here](#).

## What are the relevant support numbers for people experiencing DFV?

The following support numbers are still operating during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- [NSW Domestic Violence Line](#): 1800 65 64 63 - available 24/7 to support women with safety planning, referrals, contacting the police, courts or lawyers, helping find a women's refuge and emergency housing, and transport for women and their children.
- [1800RESPECT](#): 1800 737 732 – support, safety planning and referrals for any person affected by DFV.
- [MensLine Australia](#): 1300 78 99 78 – support for men experiencing DFV.
- [Kids Helpline](#): 1800 55 1800 – free, confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years.
- [Lifeline Australia](#): 13 11 14 – 24/7 support for people who are having difficulty coping or staying safe.
- [NSW Mental Health Line](#): 1800 011 511- professional mental health help and advice.
- [Victims Access Line](#): 1800 633 063 - the single entry point for victims of crime in NSW to access services including counselling and financial support.

### **Aboriginal specific support numbers**

- Aboriginal Family Domestic Violence Hotline: 1800 019 123 – dedicated contact line for people who would like information on victims' rights, how to access counselling and financial assistance.
- [Wirringa Baiya](#): 1800 686 587 - Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre Support for women and children who are experiencing DFV or sexual assault.

## What is the support number for perpetrators of DFV?

[The Men's Referral Service](#): 1300 766 491 - is a men's DFV telephone counselling, information and referral service and is the central point of contact for men taking responsibility for their violent behaviour. They also provide support and referrals for women and men seeking information on behalf of their male partners, friends or family members. Available between 8am – 9pm Monday to Friday and 9am – 6pm Saturday to Sunday.