



COVID-19 Update

March 20, 2020



Dear VFN family and friends,

We know this is a very scary and challenging time. We hope that you and your family are weathering the novel coronavirus pandemic all right, especially with school and childcare closures significantly impacting so many of us. As I mentioned in my first [COVID-19 update](#), we remain committed to serving families of children with special health needs/disabilities and the people who serve them, and are making every effort to meet your needs as we move to working remotely across our Family Support, Chittenden CIS-EI, and Puppets in Education programs in order to slow the progress of the virus and protect our most vulnerable Vermonters.

There is so much information about what's happening right now that it can sometimes feel overwhelming. We wanted to hopefully make your life a little easier by sharing some Frequently Asked Questions and Answers (FAQs). We've grouped these FAQs by topic to save you time.

Please let us know if you find this information helpful so we'll know if we should do it again. As always, we are here to listen and help you with any questions or concerns you have about you or your child's health, education, or well-being. Please contact us at info@vtfn.org or (802) 876-5315. We look forward to talking with you by phone or videoconferencing. We believe that social distancing should not mean social isolation!

Sending you all our very best during these unbelievably challenging times. I do believe that we *are* Vermont Strong and we'll get through this together.

From the heart,

Pam McCarthy, M.Ed.
CEO / President

Health & Well-Being

1. I'm concerned about not being prepared in case of an emergency for my child with special health care needs. How can I feel better prepared?

We are the Vermont chapter of Family Voices, a national organization that has many helpful emergency preparedness resources on their [website](#). Other emergency preparedness resources are on our [website](#).

2. As part of emergency preparedness, I'd like to have a larger supply of my child's medication on hand. Will Medicaid allow that?

Yes. "In response to COVID-19 concerns and to ensure that Medicaid members have access to the medications they need, the Department of Vermont Health Access (DVHA) is implementing the following changes to its prescription drug benefits programs, effective 3/18/2020: 1. Members may request early refills of medication up to a 90-day supply as needed." Read more [here](#).

3. Are there any COVID-19 resources specifically for parents of children with autism?

Yes. One resource is the [National Autism Association](#). If you learn of other good resources that we could share with parents, please send an email to info@vtfn.org. Also, April is [World Autism Month](#) beginning with United Nations-sanctioned World Autism Awareness Day on April 2. [Autism-friendly events](#) and educational activities take place throughout throughout the world in the month of April to increase understanding and acceptance and foster worldwide support.

4. If my family loses health insurance due to a job loss, who should I call?

Your children may qualify for Medicaid, also referred to in Vermont as Dr. Dynasaur. Check this [eligibility chart](#). Children with disabilities might also be eligible for the Disabled Children's Home Care, also known as Katie Beckett Medicaid. Katie Beckett Medicaid will retroactively cover up to 3 months if there is a lapse in coverage. Contact us or [Green Mountain Care](#) for assistance. We can help you with a Katie Beckett application or renewal. You can also take a look at our [Health Frequently Asked](#)

Questions.

5. Is there any financial help for my child's medically-necessary expenses?

Yes, income-eligible families of children with special health needs (birth to 21) may apply for up to \$1,000 per 12 month period for their child's unmet medically necessary needs such as equipment, medications, travel, and therapies. More information [here](#).

Students with Disabilities & Special Education

This information is from the Vermont Agency of Education's guidance (3/18/20) relating to supporting students with disabilities and their services, as a result of closures and dismissals related to COVID-19.

1. What will happen to my child's services when school is closed for all students due to COVID-19? [Schools are currently considered closed March 18 - April 6.]

- a) If a school closure causes educational services for all students to stop, then the school/district is generally not required to provide services to students eligible for special education services during that same period of time.
- b) During the period of school closure, a school district may provide enrichment materials to prevent loss of learning. However, any enrichment materials must be made accessible for your child with a disability. These enrichment materials are optional for you to use.
- c) After an extended closure, districts are responsible for reviewing how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to your child if they are eligible for special education services. Schools may be required to provide additional services or extended school year services to make up missed services.
- d) If your child's annual IEP review or eligibility review is due during a school closure it is important to keep lines of communication open and work with your school to plan to meet as soon as school is back in session. Another option to consider is meeting virtually during a closure, using tools such as video or audio conference calls.

2. What will happen to my child's services when a school is dismissed but educational services continue to be provided to all students through remote methods? [School dismissal may be considered after April 6.]

- a) If a school district has dismissed on-site educational services but continues to provide educational services to all students through take-home educational packets or remote learning opportunities, the district will remain responsible for ensuring your child with an individualized education program (IEP) will continue to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) during the dismissal period.
 - b) Your district should be communicating with you before, during, and after a school dismissal regarding modifications and accommodations to support your child's IEP services. Schools should work to ensure that all students continue to receive services to the most appropriate extent possible.
 - c) Although special education or related services may need to be adjusted, your IEP team should work to ensure that your child receives services comparable to all other students. Services might include schoolwork packets, online learning, or some other learning adapted to your child's needs and location.
 - d) After an extended closure or dismissal, districts are responsible for reviewing how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to your child on an IEP. Schools may need to provide additional services or extended school year services to make up missed services.
 - e) If annual IEP reviews or eligibility reviews are due during this time it is important to keep lines of communication open and work with your school to plan to meet as soon as school is back in session. Another option to consider is meeting virtually, using tools such as video or audio conference calls.
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Basic Family Needs

1. Will schools continue to provide breakfast and lunch to students?

To prepare for the potential for an extended dismissal, the Governor has directed each district to create a Continuity of Education Plan that includes meal service for those who need it. There are a variety of ways schools may meet these needs. "For many Vermont schools, setting up the grab-and-go meal pick up as a drive through pick up site may make the most sense. For other Vermont schools, it may make more sense to have children pick up meals at a walk-up location. The school could also offer home delivery upon request. This could be in conjunction with a Grab-and-Go site, or as the only method of distribution." Schools will need to work out what they are able to offer and what will work best for the families in their districts as each location is unique. We suggest that you contact your school district to learn about what is being offered in your area. [Read more](#) about school nutrition information from the Vermont Agency of Education.

2. What other resources are available to help me feed my family?

Visit the [Hunger Free Vermont website](#) for the latest updates.

3. Where can I get help if I have a legal or a benefits problem related to COVID-19?

Vermont Legal Aid and Legal Services Vermont work together to provide free civil (not criminal) legal help to low-income people and to people with disabilities who live in Vermont. Their services are free. Visit their [website](#) for information about utility shutoffs, social security, unemployment insurance, evictions, food, and more.

4. What's available to help us pay for Internet in our home so our children can participate in virtual learning from their school?

Comcast announced, "During this extraordinary time, it is vital that as many Americans as possible stay connected to the Internet - for education, work, and personal health reasons." Comcast is taking steps to implement new policies for the next 60 days, and other important initiatives. Read the details [here](#).

Children's Integrated Services - Early Intervention (CIS-EI)

Vermont families whose infants and toddlers have or are at risk of developmental delays are entitled to Early Intervention under Part C of IDEA. During the COVID-19 pandemic, CIS-EI services have been deemed "essential," and continue to be offered throughout Vermont.

1. How will COVID-19 affect my child's early intervention services?

All CIS programs in Vermont received [guidance](#) yesterday from the state's Child Development Division.

In order to ensure that we are following CDC social distancing guidelines to minimize families' exposure to COVID-19, VFN's CIS-EI program in Chittenden County suspended face-to-face home visits on Monday, March 16 for at least two weeks. Like our other programs, we continue to provide support to families, developmental education and service coordination through remote means. We are contacting families to offer virtual visits through videoconferencing and phone calls, and updating families' One Plans to reflect any changes in services the family wishes to have during the pandemic crisis.

2. How are my child's meeting and transition plans being managed during the pandemic?

CIS-EI providers throughout Vermont are figuring out the logistics, and in Chittenden County, we plan to be doing videoconferencing and phone calls in collaboration with parents/caregivers, school partners and service providers.

3. When do you expect to offer face-to-face visits for families again?

As detailed in the [guidance](#) from the Child Development Division, we are expected to offer face-to-face home/childcare visits again when schools reopen. As always, CIS-EI will coordinate these with families.

Translated Resources

What COVID-19 resources are available to share with English Language Learners?

Here are some of our favorites, all of which were created in Vermont:

Short [videos](#) created in Vermont about COVID-19 in these languages: Arabic, Dinka, French, Lingala, Nepali, Spanish, and Somali. Other languages are coming soon.

The Vermont Department of Health has a general information document [Tips to Help Keep Illness from Spreading](#):

[Arabic](#), [Burmese](#), [Chinese](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Kirundi](#), [Nepali](#), [Somali](#), [Spanish](#), [Swahili](#), [Vietnamese](#)

[COVID-19 Information By and For People with Disabilities](#) (written in plain language by Green Mountain Self-Advocates)

We're Here to Help!

Our Family Support Consultants are here to help you! You can reach us by calling (802) 876-5315 or toll-free at 1-800-800-4005. Another way to contact us is to send an email to info@vtfn.org. Include your name, phone number, and a few words about your question or concern, and best times to reach you during our business hours (Monday-Friday, 9 am - 4:30 pm) so we can have the right person on

our staff return your call. We do our very best to return calls within one business day.

Join Our Closed Facebook Page

Our [closed Facebook page](#) (Vermont Families of Children with Special Health Care Needs) is for parents, family members, and people in a parenting role. The current membership is 527 and growing. This group shares ideas, asks questions, and offers support.

Did you know we have 90+ webinars on [YouTube](#)?



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info@vtfn.org | www.vermontfamilynetwork.org

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