



Covid-19 Update

March 27, 2020



Dear VFN family and friends,

So much has happened this past week, including the very important [Stay Home Stay Safe order](#) from Governor Phil Scott that went into effect on the 25th. I hope that you and your loved ones are navigating these challenging times all right, and that you are getting help when you need it. It has been truly amazing to see the ways in which Vermonters are helping one another, neighbor to neighbor, community to community.

With yesterday's gubernatorial announcement that schools will not be opening their doors to students again this school year due to increasing concerns about the Covid-19 virus, we know that pressures are increasing for families as they try to continue their children's education at home through online and other means. We are here for you, and want to support your efforts to ensure your students with disabilities and special health needs are able to make progress towards their educational and social goals.

Our [entire staff](#) is now working remotely and our offices are temporarily closed until further notice.. Although we're not permitted to provide any in-person services or support at this time, you can continue to reach us by [phone or email](#). We're doing our very best to connect with you in within 1 business day and at a time that is mutually agreeable.

It's hard for us to know how we can be most helpful to the people we serve during these unprecedented times. [Can you please help us by taking a few minutes to complete this brief survey?](#) We will use your input to focus our staff resources on what families of children with disabilities/special health needs and the professionals who serve them need most from us right now. We're trying to answer questions that are coming our way by way of these periodic E-News Covid-19 Updates, which we've saved on our [website](#). We hope you find them timely and helpful.

I'm grateful for all the hard work of our dedicated VFN staff and our many Vermont government and community partners. I've been incredibly blessed to serve individuals, children and families for over 30 years now, and have seen many instances of strong cooperation, collaboration and connection throughout my career. I have to say that our current mutual aid efforts rival anything in my rich experience. With every passing day of our brave little state's response to this pandemic, I am increasingly inspired and humbled by the courage, commitment, and creativity being brought to bear, from your house up to the Statehouse!

An important reminder: Vermont is very fortunate to have 2-1-1, our State's centralized information and referral service. 211 staff can help with many resource questions, including housing, food assistance, other basic needs, and much more. Simply dial 2-1-1 (a local call from anywhere in VT) or 1-866-652-4636 (toll-free in VT). [Texting is another option.](#)

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 any time at info@vfn.org or (802) 876-5315. We look forward to talking with you by phone or videoconferencing. We believe that the required physical distancing right now 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. Can parents/guardians be paid for caring for their family members who aren't receiving in-home supports because of the Covid-19 pandemic?

According to parent and advocate [Tammy Carroll](#) as many as 4,000 people in Vermont receive in-home nursing and personal care that would have left them institutionalized prior to the existence of in-home support programs like High-Tech Nursing and Developmental Services Waivers. Given the pandemic, these people are often no longer able to access the support needed to ensure that they remain healthy at home. A group of advocates, including some graduates of the [Vermont Leadership Program](#), have asked our

Governor to pay parents or guardians using existing care budgets allocated to their loved ones as a mitigation strategy during the pandemic. Key Vermont State senators, including Tim Ashe are supportive of these strategies and have moved them forward to the Governor's Policy Director but orders have yet to be issued. If you'd like to join these advocates, please sign and share their [petition](#) and/or join their [private Facebook group](#).

2. What are your thoughts on having Children's Personal Care Attendants in my home?

This is SUCH a personal decision. If you do decide to have a PCA in your home, you should follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [guidelines for caregivers](#). Physical distancing and fastidious hygiene are still the best ways to guard against the spread of the novel Coronavirus. The less external contact people have right now, the better, but it is a trade-off, especially if family caregivers need to work, or rest, or both. Trust your instincts---you know your family better than anyone.

3. If my child is having a mental health emergency, should I take them to the hospital emergency room?

Yes, emergency departments are still open but have put new protocols in place because of the Covid-19 pandemic. These may include pre-screening before heading to or entering the ER, limits on the number of visitors, and the way care is delivered (e.g. telehealth versus in-person). The VT Department of Mental Health designates one Designated Agency (DA) in each geographic region of the state to provide the Department's mental health programs for adults and children. For information on DAs and Specialized Services Agencies throughout Vermont that may be helpful in a mental health emergency, [click here](#).

4. If I'm an "essential person" and need specialized child care for my child who has a disability / special health need, what can I do?

If you are an eligible, essential person who needs emergency child care, please [complete this form from the state of Vermont](#) or call 211 extension 6. The state (through the Agency of Education for children K-8, and the Child Development Division for children birth to 5) will work to connect essential persons who need child care with options for their children. Here is a list of [essential persons](#) that qualify for this emergency service. Patience is greatly appreciated as everyone involved is doing their best to contact parents as quickly as possible.

5. My elementary school child is experiencing anxiety as a result of the pandemic. Can the puppets help them understand their anxiety?

The Puppet Team has made a "home-edition" (thanks to the Vogelsang-Card family) of the PK-Grade 4 Anxiety Puppet program that you can watch [here](#). It provides some tips and tools for you and your child to use when worry is feeling big. Watch the clip together, talk about worry, and what tools you can use when it feels big. For additional mental health resources, visit our [website](#).

6. What changes have been made to Vermont Medicaid as a result of the Covid-19 emergency?

The [Department of Vermont Health Access](#) website states: "Due to the Covid-19 emergency, Vermont will be temporarily waiving financial verifications required for those seeking to enroll in health insurance; Extending out coverage periods until after the emergency ends; Suspending certain terminations of health insurance; Offering a Special Enrollment Period (1 month) for those who do not currently have health insurance to enroll in a qualified health plan and receive premium and cost-sharing assistance, if eligible. (Eligible Vermonters can continue to apply for, and enroll in, Medicaid at any time.) (3/20/2020)"

Students with Disabilities & Special Education

1. Vermont schools have been dismissed for the remainder of the school year. What does this mean for my child with a disability on an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan?

While schools will no longer have in-person instruction, Governor Scott has directed schools to engage in Continuity of Learning (COL) by April 13th. This means that schools will be required to provide education services and related supports to all their students remotely so that student learning and academic progress happens as if schools had remained open. Students with disabilities are entitled to the same access to their education. Your child's school must, to the greatest extent possible, provide your child the special education and related services identified in their IEP. Educational services, including IEP meetings and the evaluation timeline, will be expected to occur according to schedule. Schools will have to provide different distance options for parents to participate - phone conferences, zoom meetings, etc., as well as accommodations if a you cannot participate remotely.

2. My school is saying that distance/remote learning may not be available to my child with a disability because federal disability law does not allow it. Is this true?

No. [Guidance](#) released from the federal Department of Education reaffirms the rights of students to receive educational instruction and related services under federal special education law during the Covid-19 pandemic. For the safety of students and school personnel, remote instruction with reasonable accommodations most certainly is an option. The guidance also provides examples of how schools and educators can provide these services. All services delivered during distance learning should be monitored for progress. A tool like the [UDL Scan Tool](#) from the Center for Online Learning and Students with Disabilities

can be one resource a school team can utilize when considering any specific virtual learning platform. If your child or family cannot access distance learning to make progress on IEP goals, the IEP team, which includes the parent, will review any loss of skills, when schools are reopened, to decide if compensatory services are needed to make up what your child has lost while in social isolation.

3. My youth has a transition goal in their IEP (Individualized Education Program) on career exploration. How can I help them with this goal at home?

One example of how you can work on this at home is to develop a [choice board on career exploration, education and training and independent living](#). This would help outline resources and activities and help to document what you are working on at home and share with your youth's IEP team. Many resources can be found at the [National Technical Assistance Center](#).

4. How can I help my IEP (Individualized Education Program) team in identifying my youth's independent living skills?

Now is a good time to think about it while your youth is not in school. Spending more time at home may help you inform the team of your assessment and can help further develop goals in this area. The [Independent Living Postsecondary Goal IEP Team Decision Assistance Form](#), developed by the [Transition Coalition](#) at the University of Kansas, may be helpful to look at this area.

Basic Family Needs

What help is available from cable companies, mobile carriers and telephone companies during the Covid-19 pandemic?

The [Vermont Department of Public Service](#) is collecting information and resources on the availability of Internet and telecommunications services during the Covid-19 emergency. Their website includes information about what cable, telephone, and mobile carriers are doing to assist consumers and places where consumers can find internet access. They will be updating it as new information becomes available. The Vermont Department of Public Service has released an interactive [Public Wi-Fi Hot Spot Map](#) to help Vermonters connect to publicly available internet service during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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

1. How are CIS-EI team members---including my family--- communicating with one another?

In Chittenden county, your VFN Family Resource Coordinator and service providers are working together to ensure that your child and family will continue to receive early intervention (EI) services if you would like them to continue in a different format than face-to-face visits. CIS-EI service coordinators are doing this in other regions of the state as well. In order to comply with school closures and the Governor's Stay at Home order, early intervention will be offered in alternate ways while schools are not in session. Your early intervention providers will be reaching out to you to offer the option of "tele intervention" visits conducted over the phone or through other types of non-public facing video platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. These "tele intervention" visits will include opportunities to offer strategies and coaching to support you as you support your child's early education. Your parental rights will continue to be upheld and you will be asked to give your consent for either continuing with "tele intervention" visits or suspending services for a period of time. Your team will make plans with you to check in periodically during this time. Review and transition meetings will be offered through video conferencing if at all possible. Please reach out to your service coordinator if you have any questions.

2. Are Children's Integrated Services (CIS) considered essential services under the Stay at Home order?

Under the umbrella of Children's Integrated Services, Early Intervention (EI) services are considered essential and therefore should continue to be delivered at this time. Early Intervention is federally mandated for eligible infants and toddlers (birth to age 3) under [Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#).

3. What happens if I can't do virtual visits right now because of my family's circumstances and the pandemic? Will I lose EI (Early Intervention) services?

If you determine that you would like to suspend your child's early intervention services for a period of time due to any reason related to the current Covid-19 crisis, your child and family will not lose services. Your early intervention providers will work with you to set up a later time to check back in to discuss the continuation of services. If your child is turning three during this time and is potentially eligible for school services after age three, your CIS-EI service coordinator will be working with you and your school to do transition planning and processes.

Translated Resources

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

Vermont resources:

New! Vermont website with many translated Covid-19 materials: [Vermont 411 - Resources for Everyone in our Community](#)

Short [videos](#) created in Vermont about Covid-19 in these languages: [Arabic](#), [Bosnian](#), [Dinka](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Kirundi](#), [Lingala](#), [Nepali](#), [Somali](#), [Spanish](#), and [Swahili](#). More detailed videos in these languages: [Nepali](#) and [Vietnamese](#). Covid-19 videos in different languages are on [this YouTube channel](#).

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](#)

Vermont Department of Health What You Need to Know About Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) in [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 534 and growing. This group shares ideas, asks questions, and offers support.

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



(802) 876-5315 or 1-800-800-4005
info@vtfn.org | www.vermontfamilynetwork.org

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