

Helping Vermont Families for Over 30 Years!



Covid-19 Update April 3, 2020



Dear VFN family and friends,

Hope you are doing well in this rapidly changing environment. It has been a very eventful week for all of us, and we hope you and your loved ones are navigating the many challenges of Covid-19 and reaching out to us for support when you need it. *We are here for you.*

On March 27, Governor Phil Scott issued a [directive to dismiss schools](#) for in-person instruction for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. Right now, Governor Scott's [Stay Home, Stay Safe order](#) is effective until April 15. On March 29, President Trump extended national "social distancing" guidelines to April 30. On March 30, Governor Scott said in a press conference that he expects to extend the timeline for Vermont's Stay Home, Stay Safe order but it's unclear right now for how long.

Our "new normal" of staying home and distancing ourselves from others so that we can slow the spread of Covid-19, coupled with increasing change and the escalating numbers of people impacted by this virus can be overwhelming. On a daily---sometimes hourly!---basis, I have to remind myself to slow down and breathe. I am sure you can relate, especially those of you who are trying to work from home while also teaching your children. Several parents have shared with me that their children have been more clingy and needy recently. This is certainly understandable, given the gravity of our current situation. In these uncertain times, I think it's important to be gentle with ourselves and take the time to be truly present for our children and families. Doing what we can to take care of ourselves and reinforcing our connections with loved ones can give us the strength we need to get through this.

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?** Many thanks to the 49 people who have already responded. We are using the input from the survey 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 to us 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.

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@vtfn.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 incredibly tumultuous times. Let us know how we can help you. Together, we are Vermont Strong.

From the heart,

Pam McCarthy, M.Ed.
CEO / President

Health & Well-Being

1. My child has an upcoming appointment through telemedicine. What is telemedicine and what are some helpful tips to prepare for the visit?

Telemedicine is using technology to connect with a health care provider who is at a different location from you. It's also called telehealth. For helpful tips to prepare for your child's telehealth appointment, review the short [Introduction to Health Care through Telemedicine](#) from the Midwest Genetics Network. It's also helpful to call your child's provider or visit their website for more telemedicine information specific to that medical practice.

Your child's provider can guide you to the best options for telemedicine. Most telemedicine visits will require that you have access to the internet, as the healthcare provider will want to hear and see your child. A computer or cellphone will both work as long as you have a good connection to the internet. If you don't have access to the internet, visit the [Vermont Department of Public Service](#) to find the closest hotspot in order to access WiFi.

2. Will my health insurance pay for telemedicine?

A Covid-19 Emergency Response [bill](#) was passed last week in the Vermont Legislature. One section on page 16 of the bill relates to telemedicine: "All health insurance plans in this State shall provide coverage for health care services and dental services delivered through telemedicine by a health care provider at a distant site to a patient at an originating site to the same extent that the plan would cover the services if they were provided through in-person consultation." Talk with your health care provider or insurance company if you have questions or would like to know more about your coverage. For more information about telemedicine and Medicaid coverage, you may contact the [Department of Vermont Health Access](#).

3. With all my children now at home, I find it difficult to spread my attention between my child with special health needs/disability and their sibling(s). What resources are available to help my child's sibling(s) feel included?

While Vermont Family Network is no longer able to host [SibShops](#) in person, we are committed to providing support for siblings of children with special needs. We are planning a new virtual SibShop format using Zoom, which will take place **Saturday April 11th, from 1 - 2:30 pm**. Sibs will get a chance to "show and tell" a favorite room in their house, toy, pet, or whatever they choose. Afterwards, we will have a SibChat with a special guest! SibShops are open to all children in Vermont age 6+, who have a sibling with a special health need or disability. For more information or to register, please contact Molly.Lawney@vtfn.org; once you are registered, Molly will send you the Zoom link.

4. What are "essential in-person services" during the Covid-19 emergency for people with disabilities served by Choices for Care, Developmental Disabilities Services, or the Traumatic Brain Injury Program?

"Essential Services" are services that assure the health and safety of a person. Essential Services delivered in-person to an individual may continue if the services cannot be provided in an alternate, remote way such as telephone/FaceTime. All in-person service delivery must follow precautions previously set forth and found on the [DAIL Covid-19 web page](#). For examples of "Essential Services," please refer to the [March 25 memo](#) from the Deputy Commissioner of Vermont's Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living.

5. How can I help my child who has anxiety because of this whole situation?

Our [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. Use our [Guide to Getting the Conversation Going](#). For additional mental health resources, visit our [website](#).

Students with Disabilities & Special Education

1. What can I expect from my school regarding behavioral supports that my child was receiving in school? Learning at home is very difficult without these supports.

Teachers should suggest how they use behavior plans and transitions in the classroom and how it can be implemented in the distance learning environment. The Vermont Agency of Education and the Department of Mental Health are discussing options regarding the provision of behavioral supports within the [Success Beyond Six program](#).

2. My student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) at school. What can I expect the school to provide now that school is happening at home?

All schools must have Continuity of Learning (COL) in effect by April 13, if not earlier. This means schools will be required to provide education services and related supports to all of their students remotely so that student learning and academic progress is achieved as if schools had remained open.

This pertains to students on IEPs and Section 504 plans as well. Schools must evaluate each student's current IEP services and their ability to access their educational program from home. Planning needs to occur so students with disabilities can be supported in accessing online learning programs. Schools can consider additional support including apps that scribe, convert text to speech, and other built-in accessibility tools. Special educators should consider providing supplementary material to go along with virtual learning and data collections processes to parents to monitor progress of IEP goals.

If using paper materials, the school must provide students with disabilities the necessary accommodations and modifications to access the information. You may consider requesting parent training as a related service in your child's IEP. Detailed guidance is contained in [Special Education During School Closure Due to a Novel Coronavirus Outbreak](#).

3. The school is offering virtual learning but we don't have reliable Internet or a home computer. What can we do?

Schools must ensure that students with disabilities are provided access to FAPE (free and appropriate public education) and this could include the provision of necessary assistive technology, such as computers, software, instructional materials, and internet access. Guidance is provided in [Remote Education Resources for Special Education](#).

4. My child was receiving Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan. Could these services still be provided remotely?

Yes. It could be possible for these services to be provided remotely. However, these therapies, where services involve student movement, the involvement of the caregiver is almost certainly needed. The details of each child's services will have to be discussed with your child's IEP Team or your school's 504 Coordinator.

5. My youth has an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The school has contacted us saying that they are ready to graduate this June. We disagree. What should we do?

Students on IEPs graduate by having access to meaningful transition planning and meeting their [proficiency based graduation requirements](#). If you feel as though you haven't had an opportunity to contribute to your youth's transition plan, you can use your [parental rights](#) to disagree. You can ask for a meeting with your IEP Team to discuss your concerns. You can also ask your Team if they used the [Graduation](#)

[Readiness Tool](#) from the Vermont Agency of Education to make the decision about the graduation date. For more information on transition planning you can look at [VFN's Transition Toolkit for Youth with Disabilities](#) or contact us and talk with one of our Family Support Consultants.

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.

Translated Resources

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

Vermont resources:

The UVM Health Network's [translated Frequently Asked Questions About Covid-19](#)

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](#) and [Plain Language Tips for Working with Support Staff during Covid-19](#), written in plain language by [Green Mountain Self-Advocates](#)

We're Here to Help!

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 within 1 business day and at a time that is mutually agreeable.

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. Please include your name, phone

number, and a few words about your question or concern and the best times to reach so we can have the right person on our staff return your call.

Join Our Closed Facebook Page for Parents / Caregivers / Guardians

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. The support that parents are offering to each other has been particularly helpful in during this time of "social distancing."

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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