



Guidance from the Kentucky CASA Network on Returning to Work, Social Distancing, and Program Operations During COVID-19

*Updated April 1, 2021

Please note this document should serve as guidance and recommendations from the Kentucky CASA Network for consideration and adoption by each individual local CASA program board of directors as it pertains to reopening offices and returning to program operations. These recommendations are based on [Executive Orders](#) currently in place from the Commonwealth of Kentucky as well as [recommendations from the CDC](#).

*The KCN is updating this guidance effective April 1 due to the fast changing and evolving development of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout and the declining number of positive cases. [Governor Andy Beshear announced](#) in March that the state plans to open **COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to any Kentuckian 16 and older by April 5**. A comprehensive list of vaccination locations can be found on the [KY COVID website](#) to schedule an appointment. All Kentuckians under the age of 16 will be eligible to receive a COVID vaccine and this impact should be something that all Local CASA Programs consider as they have staff return to the office.

*In a webinar last month, Kentucky United Way stated that Team Kentucky is encouraging all Kentuckians to take the COVID vaccine when it becomes available to them. As good partners with CHFS, CASA programs should provide resources about vaccination sites and availability to CASA families and help facilitate important public health information to those families. The Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky recently unveiled two vaccine campaigns to spread the word about getting Kentuckians vaccinated. You can find [more information here](#) and a copy of the [toolkit materials here](#).

*The Kentucky CASA Network recommends that local CASA programs consider the incidence rates in their service areas (red, orange, yellow, and green zones) in determining their return to normal program functions. Programs serving counties in yellow and green zones, where the positivity rate is declining, should consider returning to in-person visits and resuming in-person office operations with physical distancing and mask precautions. The [incidence rate map](#) is updated daily on the KY COVID website.

***The KCN staff will be prioritizing teleworking with limited time in the office through June 30, 2021. All KCN trainings and events will be virtual through at least June 30, 2021.** The KCN's offices are part of a foundation which has strict enforcement of COVID guidelines and therefore currently does not have the ability to offer any in-person trainings or meetings to those outside of the KCN staff. Our decision to prioritize teleworking is based on these restrictions that we are bound by in our lease agreement. Most CASA programs do not have such agreements and should make their own determinations on safety and compliance around COVID, keeping in mind building/office layouts, COVID incidence rates in their service area, the number of people in the building regularly, vaccine availability, and the number of staff in the office who are vaccinated.

Assess Readiness and Return to the CASA Office and Develop Plans for Reopening for CASA Program

Staff:

- Use local and state public health information to determine when to reopen your physical CASA office for both employee access and outside visitors.
- Allow staff to choose whether to return to the workplace or not, based on their assessment of their personal health risk to themselves or their families. Staff with a health concern should be allowed to telework. Review this timeline and assess the local health risk every 30 days. A staff person's vaccination status should be taken into consideration on returning to the office.
- Programs should assess mental, emotional, and physical health when considering an employee's return.
- Programs should consider access to childcare due to childcare closings and track for the phased reopening of childcare services.

When the Program Reopens, Maintain Social and Physical Distancing Measures:

- Rearrange workstations to increase physical distancing. Do not have employees share offices.
- Restrict access to common areas, break rooms, and conference rooms.
- Mark six-foot distances on the floor of the offices.
- Prioritize using phone and videoconferencing even among employees in the office.
- Create rotating work schedules.
- Require the use of facial masks and coverings when staff are outside of their office space [per Executive Orders](#).
- Restrict all non-essential travel. Allow employees the option of attending future in-person trainings based on their comfort level.
- Establish clear policies regarding illness, including not allowing access to the CASA office if staff are ill or have a fever.
- Ensure hand sanitizer is available to all employees.
- *Prioritize conducting board meetings virtually via videoconferencing platforms through at least **April 15, 2021** in those situations where COVID social distancing requirements cannot be met. Boards that have members that are fully vaccinated and can socially distance may choose to start holding in-person board meetings by **April 1, 2021**.
- *Encouraged not to hold inside venue fundraisers or events that will bring in more than 10 people through at least **April 15, 2021**, seeking approval through local/state guidelines. Outdoor events with larger groups may be considered.
- When interviewing, follow [National CASA/GAL's guidance](#) on interviewing volunteers and employees during COVID-19. Virtual interviews can be conducted but an in-person interview should be completed by at least one staff or board member prior to an offer of employment; proper social distancing requirements should be met during this in-person interview.
- Consult National CASA/GAL Association's guidance regarding [maintaining confidentiality](#) and [alternatives to in-person signatures](#).

When Program Operations Reopen:

- Follow [Executive Orders](#) regarding group gatherings for trainings and meetings, especially [recommendations for “red county” reductions](#). The [incidence rate map](#) is now being updated daily on the Team Kentucky website.
- Prioritize and offer virtual trainings for the required 12 hours of continuing education each year.
- *Do not begin new in-person pre-service training before **April 15, 2021** for 10 or more participants.
- Restrict non-essential visitors, volunteers, and other activities. Allow on a case-by-case basis only when doing the work remotely is not possible. Prioritize remote check-ins with volunteers versus having them come into the office.
- Require the use of facial masks and coverings for CASA staff when meeting with volunteers. Provide masks to volunteers.
- Follow local policies on returning to court. Maintain social distance and require staff to wear a face covering when attending court. Do not require CASA volunteers to attend court in-person if they are not comfortable.
 - See this [Virtual Court Observations Policy](#) example from CASA of West Kentucky.
- *Prioritize virtual visits with CASA children until at least **April 15, 2021 for volunteers who have not received all doses of the COVID vaccine**. Continue to complete an exception form for the virtual visits each month. Every monthly contact should be documented with either an exception form or completed screening questions (see below). **Return to in-person visits for those who are fully vaccinated or who have filled out a liability waiver.**
- If necessary, due to case concerns and emergencies, begin face-to-face home visits but have a procedure that volunteers and staff must follow for proper social distancing and wearing masks during visits, prioritizing meeting in outdoor settings (parks, backyards, patios). We also recommend contacting the family prior to but on the day of the visit to [ask screening questions](#) (Google Form example from CASA of Graves County & Southwest KY) and for supervisors to ask screening questions of volunteers prior to but on the day of the visit, including documentation in the case file. Please see [these tips](#) for interactions with children during COVID-19 from CASA of West Kentucky. For programs that are allowing in-person visits with masks and social distancing, [consider using this waiver from the National CASA Association](#).

Please see this [link to a letter from the Children's Bureau commissioner](#) about the requirement to initiate a petition to terminate a parent's rights if the child has been in foster care for 15 out of the most recent 22 months (the 15/22 requirement). Jerry Milner writes, "In light of the devastating impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on child welfare systems and applicable exceptions to the 15/22 requirement, I cannot emphasize how strongly I urge agencies to carefully consider whether it is appropriate to terminate a parent's rights pursuant to the 15/22 requirements."

As children return to in-person learning, please review this [one-page list of courtroom questions](#) to address education during COVID-19 from the American Bar Association.

THESE RECOMMENDATIONS WILL BE UPDATED EVERY 30 DAYS AND PROVIDED TO LOCAL PROGRAMS THROUGHOUT 2021.