



Important Information on NHR's Response to SARS-CoV-2 (aka Corona Virus)

Monday, 8/24/2020
6:30 p.m.

Community Outings, Home Visits and Visits to NHR Certified Residential Sites

On 7/10/20, OPWDD released updated guidance related to community outings facilitated by NHR staff and home visits to families by people we support in certified residential programs. The guidance built-on guidance issued by OPWDD on 6/18/20 which allowed providers like NHR to “opt in” to an attestation program that would allow limited visits to NHR certified residential sites by families (natural supports) of people we support.

Community Outings:

The guidance on 7/10, provided that effective 7/15, NHR staff could facilitate community outings and low risk activities such as going to medical, professional service appointments and work. The guidance provided that “low risk, outdoor activities are encouraged whenever possible” and that “community outings to stores, outdoor restaurants, salon, etc. should be **extremely limited in frequency and duration.**” Outings were to be limited to people (housemates) and staff who were in regular contact with each other – and required additional safeguards (social distancing, wearing masks, hand hygiene practices, limitation to one recreational outing per day, transportation restrictions and requirements) as well as documentation requirements.

On receipt of the 7/10 guidance, NHR's management team immediately began work to establish supporting policies and procedures and related forms to implement the 7/10 guidance and then to train hundreds of staff members throughout NHR on these policies, procedures and forms. We also began individualized readiness assessments of people we support to determine their ability to safely participate in community outings that require social distancing, wearing masks, et. These trainings and assessments were conducted in mid-July and community outings began in that same timeframe. At NHR, to date, we have defined community outings as: (i) walks in the neighborhood; (ii) walks and activities in parks; (iii) planned visits to NHR's Briggs Farm; and (iv) rides in the community with no stops (except for drive-thru restaurants – with no one exiting the vehicle). We have also resumed non-urgent medical/professional appointments which had been suspended earlier in the pandemic, though continuing to use telemed appointments where available and appropriate.

Overall, our experience with these limited outings has been successful. People we support are overjoyed to have greater access to the community and with the safeguards in place, risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 has been mitigated.

On 8/17/20, OPWDD released additional guidance relaxing one of the transportation restrictions that was contained in the 7/10 guidance and that limited NHR's ability to get people into the community. The original guidance stated that "capacity on buses, vans, and other vehicles should be reduced to 50% of total capacity to maximize social distancing and reduce COVID-19 transmission risks." **The 8/17/20 guidance retained that language but added "however, individuals and staff who reside/work together in the same home may be transported in the same vehicle without a vehicle capacity reduction."** This is a practical, commonsense amendment that NHR has already begun to implement throughout NHR.

Home Visits:

The 7/10 guidance from OPWDD also allowed people we support effective 7/15 to resume "participation in home and family visits with all appropriate risk mitigation strategies in place." The guidance required additional safeguards and extensive documentation requirements (that among things will facilitate contact tracing should that be needed) were in place before beginning visits. On receipt of the 7/10 guidance, NHR's management team immediately began work to establish supporting policies and procedures and related forms to implement the 7/10 guidance and then to train hundreds of staff members throughout NHR on these policies, procedures and forms and implemented shortly thereafter.

The guidance clearly anticipates that these home/family visits will be to the family home and that **"exposure...to public places, in general, should be done with caution and on a limited basis."** At NHR, we have requested that families limit visits to: (i) the family home or other setting where contact with the general public will be limited; (ii) rides in the community (including drive thru restaurants) with no visits inside stores, malls, restaurants, etc.; (iii) outdoor activities where masks are worn and social distancing is practiced; and, (iv) planned visits to West Road where the use of a 2nd floor conference room can provide an air conditioned space in which to enjoy a visit and share a meal. Home visits can be overnight visits up to 6 overnights in duration. Home visits beyond that timeframe (or those that involve out of state travel) are allowed but require additional planning in conjunction with the local health department to determine whether and what kind of precautionary quarantine will be required on a person's return to NHR. Currently there are 4 people we support who are on extended home visits which will require a review with the local department of health prior to their return to NHR.

Overall, our experience with home visits to date has been very positive – meaningfully enriching people’s daily lives. We have had several instances where families have not honored restrictions on types of activities appropriate for home visits in a time of pandemic or where there was confusion on expectations and documentation requirements. In those instances, NHR’s management team follows up with families to ensure that going forward we have a shared understanding of expectations for home visits and compliance with those expectations going forward to help ensure that everyone – people we support and NHR’s staff – remain safe.

Visits to NHR Certified Residential Sites:

On 6/18/20, OPWDD issued a guidance that allowed providers like NHR to “opt in” to allow limited visits to NHR’s certified residential sites provided that NHR attest that it would ensure that OPWDD-defined safeguards were in place. Following receipt of that guidance, NHR’s management team immediately began work to establish supporting policies and procedures and related forms to implement the 6/18 guidance and then to train hundreds of staff members throughout NHR on these policies, procedures and forms and implemented shortly thereafter.

The 6/18 guidance states that “Visitation” is encouraged to occur outdoors....” NHR has expended considerable resources in ensuring that additional outdoor patio furniture, tents, and fans have been available to facilitate these outdoor visits. We have made the 2nd floor conference room at West Road available for planned visits where people can enjoy a visit in air-conditioned space. We allow – with safeguards in place – people to share a meal outdoors with their family member. Visits are generally limited to 30 minutes in duration (to allow opportunities for other families to visit) but can be scheduled for longer periods on request and with planning.

Overall these visits have been going well. We are working on how to facilitate these visits as the weather gets colder. Some of our sites are more conducive to inside visits than others. Our largest challenge to date has probably been staffing – with staff doing their regular work (including community outings) and then asked to facilitate home visits and site visits – a great deal has been asked of them in terms of following additional procedures and documentation requirements.

Day Habilitation

On 7/10/20, OPWDD issued guidance that effective 7/15, allowed day programs and services certified by OPWDD to “resume operations safely and consistently with the Governor’s NY Forward initiative.” The timing of the announcement – with no prior communication to providers or provider associations – was likely driven at least in part by the decision of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that “retainer day payments” to providers of day programs and services would end on 7/21. These payments had been available to providers since March when OPWDD temporarily suspended normal operation of day programs and services. These payments allowed providers to retain day habilitation staff (temporarily repurposing these staff to residential programs in NHR’s case). As such, NHR took an extremely cautious approach to resuming operation of our site-based day habilitation programs, our WOW program and sending people receiving supports in our residential program to day programs operated by other providers. **On 8/24/20, OWPDD issued guidance that continued to offer day hab providers like NHR with some flexibility in meeting certain billing standards. We are in the process of evaluating this new guidance and will provide updates to staff once we have done so.**

Napanoch Day Hab

After much work, NHR is pleased to announce that effective 8/24/20, we have resumed operations at our site-based day habilitation program in Napanoch, NY. Prior to the suspension of normal operations in March, this program had been limited to supporting people living in our residential programs and this remains true now. This reduces risk of exposure to and transmission of SARS-CoV-2 as no individuals or staff from other providers will be present. In planning to reopen this site, NHR was required to develop a safety plan which we filed with OPWDD as well as a plan required by NY Forward. Both plans are attached to this update. Beyond the safeguards specified in the plans (masks, social distancing, hand hygiene, etc.), NHR also upgraded the HVAC system at our Napanoch site to enhance safety through the use of MERV-13 filtering; the installation of UV lights within the HVAC system to treat filtered air; and adjusting the settings of the HVAC system to ensure more frequent replacement of air within the space. Many thanks are owed to Rosemarie Heins and her team at the Napanoch Day Hab, Chris Fortune, Mae Smith and Sandi Swan for getting us to this point. Thanks also to Angelo Barcia to working with a contractor to ensure that the HVAC upgrades occurred. All people participating day hab at Napanoch have had their family “opt in” to allow a return to day hab at that site.

West Road Day Hab

At this time, NHR has no immediate plans to resume our site-based day program at West Road. We are in the process of beginning upgrades to the HVAC systems (there are more than a

dozen!) at West Road as we did at Napanoch. The contractor will be at West Road working on the upgrades on 9/8. Even after those upgrades are complete, a return to West Road seems further on as we believe we must continue to dedicate space at West Road for our Recovery Center for people who need to be quarantined/isolated related to the ongoing SAR-CoV-2 pandemic. People supported residentially by NHR who attended this program will continue to receive day services in their home in a manner consistent with OPWDD and other applicable regulations. When the West Road day hab does reopen- it will expand to include more of the first floor at West Road.

WOW Program with Hub at West Road

Prior to the pandemic, NHR operated our WOW (without walls) day hab program from a hub located at 129 West Road (the little yellow house). We have notified OPWDD that we plan to relocate the hub to 123 West Road and are dedicating space on the 2nd floor at West Road for this purpose (the little yellow house will become a 3 person supervised IRA). The pandemic has taught us that we need less space for administrative staff than we once believed and while there will continue to be administrative presence at West Road, we will be reducing our administrative footprint to allow more room for program space. Initially, the additional space will support social distancing restrictions to support current day hab participants and eventually will allow us to expand day hab opportunities to people joining the NHR family as part of our work with students graduating from residential schools. A modified version of our WOW program may resume operations in late September or in October.

External Day Hab Providers

While many of the people that NHR supports residentially participate in a day program operated by NHR, some have selected day programs operated by other providers – including site based and WOW programs. In order to protect the person attending that program, their housemates here at NHR and our staff, NHR carefully reviews the safety plans of other providers. Only after NHR has reviewed and accepted the plan will we allow people living with us to attend a day program from another provider. To date (8/24/20), NHR has approved the safety plan adopted by one sister agency and anticipate that people from NHR will begin attending that day hab program in September. We are in the process of notifying the individuals, their families and care managers. As with our own day programs, we will require a family to “opt in” to allow us to send their family member to the external day hab program. We are currently working with several other providers to address our concerns with their safety plans and expect that in the coming weeks, we may begin sending people we support residentially to other day hab providers.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) / Other Safeguards

NHR has committed to keeping a 3-month supply of PPE in stock during the pandemic to ensure that staff and people we support have the equipment that they need. We continue to work with provider associations to source this PPE. The cost of doing so is high. Fortunately, NHR has received many donations from member of NHR's Family Group to help pay for these expenses that are well beyond what we normally budget for.

In a bit of good news that stem from the efforts of Nancy Slauson (NHR's CFO) and others, NHR has been approved to receive funding through the CARES Act Provider Relief Fund for Medicaid, CHIP and Dental Providers statute administered by HHS. NHR expects that we may receive approximately \$82,000. This money will certainly ease the burden in the here and now in paying for the additional PPE we need to purchase.

Based on guidance from OPWDD, NHR has discontinued our practice of allowing NHR staff from wearing cloth masks at work. We now require staff to wear surgical masks that we provide (or KN-95 masks if indicated). We are also encouraging people we support to wear surgical masks and will provide these masks to them. If a person we support refuses to wear a surgical mask, but will wear a cloth mask, we will of course support that.

NHR's Nursing Team will be working to ensure that (unless contraindicated), people we support receive their flu shot beginning in late September into October. Our HR Team will be getting the word out to NHR's staff on the importance – particularly in this year of pandemic – of being vaccinated. Apart from reducing our collective risk of suffering from the flu, doing so will help relieve the burden of hospitals which may be overwhelmed should COVID-19 incidence increase this fall as we spend more time indoors.

Communicating Among and with Stakeholders

NHR's Executive Management Team continues to meet daily (Monday-Friday) and more frequently when needed to review NHR's response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The Executive Management Team meets bi-weekly every other Monday with the NHR Family Group and weekly every Wednesday with NHR's residential, clinical and day services teams to provide updates and provide an open forum for questions and issues to be raised. The Executive Management Team also meets bi-weekly every other Monday with members of NHR's Board of Directors to keep them informed and provide an opportunity for them to ask questions. While the management teams throughout NHR will ensure that information is communicated to staff, we will be providing a general update to all staff by email on NHR's response to the SARS-CoV-2

pandemic on a schedule that mirrors the meetings we have with the NHR Family Group and Board.

People and Staff Update

As of 8/24/20, no person that NHR supports is currently diagnosed with COVID-19 or isolated at our Recovery Center. As of 8/24/20, no person that NHR employs is currently diagnosed with COVID-19 or currently the subject of a quarantine. This is the result of the exemplary work of everyone at NHR to help keep us safe.

Stay the Course!

COVID is in the community – we have learned that two local providers have recently experienced COVID among people/staff. Until effective treatments and vaccines are available, the NHR community – and the broader community of which we are inextricably a part – remain vulnerable to SARS-CoV-2. Each of us, working together, make a difference every day to help hold the NHR community together and keep us all safe in challenging times. **Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Even though many of us have “precaution fatigue” please - wear a mask -wash your hands -stay the course!**