

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

ABSTRACT

Department for Women, Children, Differently Abled & Senior Citizens – COVID-19 – Directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in W.P(Civil) No. 4 of 2020 in the "matter of In Re Contagion of COVID-19 virus in Children Protection Homes – Measures needs to be taken to prevent Corona (COVID-19) – Orders – Issued

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G.O.Rt.No.61.

Dated:06-04-2020.

Read the following:-

1. Order No.40-3/2020-DM-I(A), Ministry of Home Affairs, Dt.24.03.2020
2. G.O.Rt.No.216 Health Medical and Family Welfare (B2) Dept, Dt:24.03.2020
3. Order No.40-3/2020-DM-I(A), Ministry of Home Affairs, Dt:25.03.2020
4. Orders of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the Suo Moto Writ Petition(Civil) No.04/2020, Dt:03.04.2020.
5. Letter No.WDC04-12021/1/2018, Dt:27.03.2020 from the Director, JWCS&WSC, communicating the orders of the Hon'ble High Court of Andhra Pradesh in W.P.No.8129 of 2020 to all the District Collectors in the state.

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ORDER:

In the order 1st read above, in view of COVID-19 situation in the country, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India has issued orders for lockdown for a period of 21 days w.e.f. 25.03.2020. Accordingly, in compliance to the orders of Government of India, vide reference 2nd read above, Government of Andhra Pradesh have issued orders for lockdown of State for 21 days w.e.f. 25.03.2020.

2. In the order 3rd read above, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, has issued Orders for operation of Homes meant for Children/disables/ senior citizens/ destitute/ Women/ widows, observation homes during the lockdown period.

3. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, in its order dated 03.4.2020 in W.P (Civil) No. 4/2020 issued certain directions to all the functionaries involved in the Juvenile Justice (JJ) system.

4. In view of the above, the following instructions are hereby issued to the Director, Juvenile Welfare, Correctional Services & Welfare of Street Children and Director, Women Development & Child Welfare, District Collectors, Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) and Child Care Institutions (CCIs) in consonance with the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, for strict compliance .

I. Measures to be taken by Child Welfare Committees:

- Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) are directed to proactively consider steps that are to be taken in the light of COVID-19, while conducting their inquiries/ inspections and also whether a child or children should be kept in the Child Care Institution (CCI) considering the best interest, health and safety concerns
- Special online sittings or video sessions may be called to consider measures that may be taken to prevent children residing in the Children's Homes, Special Adoption Agencies (SAAs), and Open Shelters from risk of harm arising out of COVID- 19
- Gate-keeping or preventive measures need to be considered and families counseled to ensure that institutionalization is the last resort. Focus should be on prevention of separation when possible.
- Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) to monitor cases telephonically for children who have been sent back to their families and coordinate through the District Child Protection Committees and Foster care and Adoption Committees (SFCACs) for children in foster care.

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- As far as possible, online help desks and support systems for queries to be established at the state level for children and staff in Child Care Institutions (CCIs).
- It is important to consider that violence, including sexual and gender based violence may be exacerbated in contexts of anxiety and stress produced by lockdown and fear of the disease, Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) can monitor regularly through video conferencing, WhatsApp and telephonically to ensure prevention of all forms of violence.

II. Measures to be taken by Juvenile Justice Boards and Children courts:

Juvenile Justice Boards (JJB) and Children's Courts are to proactively consider steps that are to be taken in the light of COVID-19, while conducting their inquiries/inspections. Online or video sessions can be organized.

- The Juvenile Justice Boards/Children's Courts may consider measures to prevent children residing in Observation Homes, Special Homes and Places of Safety from risk of harm arising out of COVID- 19.
- In this regard, JJBs and Children's Courts are to proactively consider whether a child or children should be kept in the Child Care Institution (CCI) considering the best interest, health and safety concerns. These may include:
 - Children alleged to be in conflict with law, residing in Observation Homes, Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) shall consider taking steps to release all children on bail, unless there are clear and valid reasons for the application of the proviso to Section 12, Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.
 - Video conferencing or online sittings can be held to prevent contact for speedy disposal of cases.
 - Ensure that counselling services are provided for all children in Observation homes.

It is important to consider that violence, including sexual violence may be exacerbated in contexts of anxiety and stress produced by lockdown and fear of the disease. JJBs would need to monitor the situation in the Observation Homes on a regular basis.

III. Measures to be taken by Director JWCS&WSC and Director, WDCW:

The Director, Juvenile Welfare & Correctional Services & Director, Women Development and Child Welfare are directed to:

- circulate information to all Child Care Institutions (CCIs) in the state about how to deal with COVID - 19 immediately, with instructions that awareness about COVID- 19 is spread in a timely and effective manner;
- begin preparing for a disaster/emergency situation that may arise. Work with Persons in Charge of Child Care Institutions (CCIs) and District Child Protection Units to plan staffing rotations or schedules to reduce in-person interaction by Child Care Institution (CCI) staff, where feasible. Begin developing a system for how to organise trained volunteers who could step in to care for children, when the need arises;
- ensure that all government functionaries perform their duties diligently, and that strict action would be taken should there be any dereliction of duty. As per Rule 66 (1), Juvenile Justice Model Rules, 2016, any dereliction of duty, violation of rules and orders, shall be viewed seriously and strict disciplinary action shall be taken or recommended by the Person-in-charge against the erring officials;
- make provisions to ensure that counselling is made available, and that there are monitoring systems in place to prevent violence, abuse, and neglect, including gender-based violence, which may be exacerbated in contexts of stress produced by lockdown;

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- ensure adequate budgetary allocation are made to meet the costs that are likely to arise for the effective management of the pandemic, and that all bottlenecks and procedural delays are effectively curbed;
- ensure adequate availability of good quality face masks, soap, disinfectants such as bleach, or alcohol-based disinfectants, etc.;
- ensure availability of adequate food, drinking water, and other necessities such as clean clothes, menstrual hygiene products, etc.
- take the following measures for children under Foster care and Kinship care:
 - Families that are fostering children should receive information about how to prevent COVID-19 as indicated above.
 - Follow up should be made on their health and psychosocial well-being status, and they should be informed of how to do in case of symptoms.
- take immediate action to translate the orders of Hon'ble Supreme Court dated 03-04-2020 in W.P. (Civil) No.4/2020 into Telugu language and send the same to all the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) and Child Care Institutions (CCIs).

IV. Directions to the Child Care Institutions (CCIs):

The Person in Charge of the Child Care Institution (CCI) and all other staff working in the CCI shall proactively and diligently take all necessary steps and measures to keep the children safe from the risk of harm arising out of COVID-19, in furtherance of the fundamental principle of safety enshrined in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (JJ Act, 2015). Further they are informed that

- the Health Ministry has set up **new National Helpline on COVID-19, i.e., 1075 and 1800-112-545**. In case of any queries or clarifications related to Coronavirus pandemic, call on this number. In addition, **Childline 1098** continues to be operational;
- in the case of staff or children with symptoms, call the help lines above mentioned and or a local doctor. Go to the hospital only if they receive such advise by doctor/helpline, or if symptoms are severe.
- staff or any other individual found to be exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 should not be permitted to enter into the Child Care Institution (CCI);
- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (MOHFW), has issued guidelines on Social Distancing. All the CCIs should adhere to those guidelines and practice social distancing.
- Child Care Institutions (CCIs) should enforce regular hand washing with safe water and soap, alcohol rub/hand sanitizer or chlorine solution and, at a minimum, daily disinfection and cleaning of various surfaces including the kitchen and bathrooms. Where adequate water is not available, immediate steps should be taken to ensure it is made available through necessary action, including enhancing budget allocation for the said purpose;
- Child Care Institutions (CCIs) should provide appropriate water, sanitation, disinfection, and waste management facilities and follow environmental cleaning and decontamination procedures.
- This information should be made available to families fostering children under foster or kinship care schemes.

V. Preventive Measures for Child Care Institutions (CCIs):

In order to prevent children and staff members in Child Care Institutions (CCIs) from getting infected by COVID - 19, Persons in Charge of Child Care Institutions (CCIs) and all other staff working in the CCI shall:

1. Know and make known how COVID -19 spreads

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. Current understanding on the virus is that it spreads mainly from person-to-person.

- Between a person who is infected with the virus and other people who are in close contact with that person;
- Having face-to-face contact with a COVID-19 patient within 2 meters and for more than 15 minutes;
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs;
- There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19.

2. Take necessary steps to practice, promote and demonstrate positive hygiene behaviours and monitor their uptake

- Frequent usage of hand sanitizer by guard, gardener, driver, etc. present in the residential premises/compound. Ensure that hands are cleaned and disinfected often - Clean hands at the main door and schedule regular hand washing reminders;
- If possible, make arrangements hand sanitizers that contain at least 70% alcohol. Ensure that all surfaces of hands are covered, and they are rubbed together until they feel dry. The Person in Charge of the Child Care Institution (CCI) should make necessary arrangements to utilize emergency/contingency funds for this purpose, and submit requisition for additional budgetary allocation where required, at the earliest.

3. Practice social distancing

- Physical distancing must be maintained. Shaking hands and hugging as a matter of greeting to be avoided. Instruct children and staff to maintain social distance by putting distance (at least 2 metres (6 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing) between themselves and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in the community. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick, such as older;
- Reduce number of people entering into Child Care Institutions (CCIs);
- Meetings shall be done through video conferences and/or rescheduled;
- Distancing should be applying in the Child Care Institutions (CCIs) where children and staff members congregate such as the reading, dining and television rooms. For example, use of these spaces can be scheduled at 25% participation and the schedule developed to ensure more social distancing.

4. Cleaning and disinfecting rigorously

Current evidence suggests that COVID-19 may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials. Cleaning refers to the removal of dirt and impurities, including germs, from surfaces. Cleaning alone does not kill germs. But by removing the germs, it decreases their number and therefore any risk of spreading infection. Disinfecting works by using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs. But killing germs remaining on a surface after cleaning further reduces any risk of spreading infection.

- Clean and disinfect the Child Care Institution (CCI) building, especially water and sanitation facilities at least once a day, and particularly surfaces that are touched by many people (railings, door and window handles, toys, teaching and learning aids etc.) Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes gates/doors, doorbells, tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, phones, toilets, water taps, wash basins, etc.;

- Do not shake dirty laundry; this can minimize the possibility of dispersing virus through the air;
- Wash items using the hot water and dry items completely. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an ill person can however be washed with other people's items if washed in hot water and with adequate amounts of soap/detergent;
- Ensure adequate, clean toilets;
- Maintain clean and hygienic kitchen conditions;
- Cleaning/disinfecting all couriers packages, parcels, grocery packets before bringing inside the house and sanitizing hands right after the process. Preferably wear disposable gloves;
- For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common household disinfectants should be used when possible.

VI. Responsive Measures for Child Care Institutions (CCIs):

Further the Persons in Charge of Child Care Institutions (CCIs) are directed to follow the responsive measures :

1. **Conduct regular screening:** Symptoms can include fever, cough and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia or breathing difficulties. These symptoms are similar to the flu (influenza) or the common cold, which are a lot more common than COVID-19. This is why testing is required to confirm if someone has COVID-19;
2. **Health referral system to be followed:** The CCI should immediately follow procedures established by the Ministry/Department of Health and Family Welfare, if children or staff or other service providers working in the CCI become unwell. First step is to inform the nurse/doctor attached to the CCI at the earliest, when there is a suspicion of COVID-19 infection in any staff/child. CCIs can call the helplines referred above or a local doctor. Children or people affected should go only if such advise is given by doctor/helpline, or if symptoms are severe;
3. **Quarantine:** In case of symptoms, the children the CCI should have a quarantine/segregated section (where possible) & make alternate arrangements where a quarantine facility is not possible;
4. **Planning in advance for emergency situations.** The Person in Charge of the CCI shall, in coordination with the health staff attached to the CCI, - plan ahead with the local health authorities to plan for any emergency that may arise due to the COVID-19. This shall include:
 - updating the emergency contact lists.
 - separating sick children and staff from those who are well, without creating stigma;
 - for informing parents/caregivers, and consulting with health care providers/health authorities wherever possible; and
 - whether or not children/staff need to be referred directly to a health facility, depending on the situation/context, or sent home, after obtaining the necessary orders from the concerned Child Welfare Committee or Juvenile Justice Board, or Children's Court.
 - Information about such procedures shall be shared with staff, parents and children ahead of time.

VII. Guidance on measures to ensure wellbeing of Children (CNCP And CICwL):

- **It is important to acknowledge that for children, it is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during an ongoing pandemic like COVID-19 disease.** They may express psychological distress (anxiety, sadness) by acting out in a different way- each child behaves differently. Some may become silent while other may feel and express anger and hyperactivity;
- **Reassure the children that they are safe. Let them know it is okay if they feel upset.** Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you. Caregivers need to validate these emotions and talk to children calmly about what is happening in a way that they can understand. Keep it simple and appropriate for each child's age. Give children opportunities to talk about what they are feeling. Anxiety and stress is also borne out of lack of knowledge, rumours and misinformation. Provide right kind of information from trusted sources an honest, age-appropriate manner. Take time to talk with the children and to share the facts about COVID-19, - enabling them to understand the actual risk can make an outbreak less stressful;
- **Encourage children to connect with each other and to talk with people they trust, about their concerns and how they are feeling;**
- **Avoid watching, reading, listening or discussing too much news about the COVID-19 and persuade children to divert their attention to other topics as well.** Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting;
- Disruption of routine and closure of schools may be stressful for children. **Try to continue with the regular routine maintained in the home, with minimal disruptions**, so as to maintain a sense of security and wellbeing, while taking all measures to ensure the safety of the children and the staff;
- **Spend time with children and help them to unwind, preferably doing activities they enjoy.** Make it a point to have interactive activities, games etc. with children to keep them engaged in a positive way. Make sure children have enough opportunity to move around, run and do physical activities. If schools are going to be closed for a period of time, talk to teachers to put up a list of interactive child-centric activities to keep children engaged;
- **It is important to consider that violence, including sexual and gender-based violence may be exacerbated in contexts of anxiety and stress produced by lockdown and fear of the disease. Do not use corporal punishment/violence to discipline children.** This will add to their anxiety and stress and may have serious mental health implication. All CCI staff need to be cognizant of the fact that there is an increased risk of violence (by peers, other staff members) including sexual abuse. Ensure prevention of all forms of violence;
- **Guide students on how to support their peers and prevent exclusion and bullying;**
- **Work with the health staff/social workers/counsellors to identify and support children and staff who exhibit signs of distress in the CCI.** In CCIs, there may be some children who are undergoing some kind of counselling or treatment for pre-existing mental health issues. Ensure continuance of the treatment/therapy in consultation with the therapist/psychiatrist;

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- **Ensure that no staff or child is subject to any form of stigmatizing words or behavior arising due to coughing, sneezing, etc.,** as this violates the principles of “equality and non-discrimination,’ ‘dignity and worth’;
- **Encourage and support children to take care of their bodies** - taking deep breaths, stretching, doing yoga/meditation, eating healthy, well-balanced meals, exercising regularly, getting plenty of sleep, etc.
- **Work with social service systems to ensure continuity of critical services that may take place in CCIs,** such as health screenings, or therapies for children with special needs. Consider the specific needs of children with disabilities, and how marginalized populations may be more acutely impacted by the illness or its secondary effects.

5. All the District Collectors in the state, who are the Registration Authority for registering Child Care Institutions (CCIs) under Juvenile Justice (CPC) Act 2015, must monitor the functioning of Child Care Institutions (CCIs) to ensure compliance of the directions of the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India (Judgment copy is enclosed) and also to the directions issued by the Hon’ble High Court of Andhra Pradesh in W.P.No.8219 of 2020, dated 26.03.2020.

6. The Director, Juvenile Welfare, Correctional Services & Welfare of Street Children, Director, Women Development & Child Welfare and District Collectors are requested to take further necessary action accordingly in the matter.

(BY ORDER AND IN THE NAME OF THE GOVERNOR OF ANDHRA PRADESH)

K.DAMAYANTHI
PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO GOVT

To

The Director, Juvenile Welfare, Correctional Services & Welfare of Street Children

The Director, Women Development & Child Welfare

All the District Collectors in the State.

All the Child Welfare Committees through the Director, JWCS&WSC

All the Child Care Institutions through the Director, JWCS&WSC

The Concerned Officers through the Director, JWCS&WSC and Director, WD&CW

Copy to:

The Special Secretary, Dept., of Grama Volunteers & Ward Volunteers,
Village Secretariat and Ward Secretariat System.

The Registrar(Admn) of the Hon’ble High Court of Andhra Pradesh for placing before
the Hon’ble J.J. Committee for information

The O.S.D. to Chief Secretary

The P.S. to Hon’ble Minister for WCDA & SCs.

The P.S. to Prl. Secy. to Govt., Dept., for WCDA & SCs.

The H.M&F.W. Department.

// FORWARDED::BY ORDER//

SECTION OFFICER