

SoonerStart

Guidance for Services During COVID-19



OKLAHOMA
Education

Updated August 2021



SoonerStart COVID-19 Services Plan

The **SoonerStart Guidance for Services during COVID-19** provides protocols for the safe delivery of early intervention services. These protocols align with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Oklahoma Department of Education (OSDE), and the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and intend to:

- Ensure equitable and appropriate services for SoonerStart families.
- Prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health of families, children, and our workforce.
- Sustain our partnerships with families around their children’s growth and development; and
- Support SoonerStart personnel to deliver early intervention services to children and families.

SoonerStart currently utilizes the Oklahoma COVID-19 Alert System, a three-tiered risk measurement tool with corresponding color categories that identify the current COVID-19 risk level, to inform service delivery options. The phases outlined in the program guidance outline specific procedures for maximizing early intervention services while ensuring the safety of staff and families.

The Oklahoma COVID-19 Alert System issues alert levels for each county every Wednesday based on data from the prior week. County alert levels may change periodically dependent on COVID-19 transmission data. To maintain as much consistency as possible in providing services, SoonerStart staff will follow the requirements outlined in each of the phases when a county has remained the same risk level (color) for two consecutive weeks. Any state of emergency orders by the Governor or restrictions mandated by SoonerStart agencies or local, state, or federal government may result in the update or revision of the program guidance.

SoonerStart Staff Requirements

Staff should follow current [CDC Safety Recommendations](#) regarding face coverings, social distancing, and workplace safety in their office and during the course of their workday unless more restrictive requirements are prescribed by their agency.

Staff who have tested positive for COVID-19 are required to self-isolate at home and cannot return to the office or provide in-person services until:

- They have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medications AND
- Has had improvement in symptoms AND
- At least ten days have passed since their symptoms first appeared.

If a fully vaccinated person is exposed, the CDC also recommends that they get tested 3-5 days after being exposed, even if they don't have symptoms and wear a mask indoors in public for 14 days following exposure or until their test result is negative.

Staff that can work while quarantined may continue to provide services through phone or video conferencing technology with their supervisor's approval.

SoonerStart Procedures for In-Person Visits

SoonerStart Staff

Before meeting with a family for a face-to-face visit, the service provider (and RC, if applicable) must answer "no" to the following questions:

If you have not had COVID-19 in the past three months or are currently not fully vaccinated:

- Have you had close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 14 days?
- Are you currently ill? Do you have symptoms of a cold, cough, shortness of breath, chilling, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headaches, congestion, sore throat, or a temperature of 100 degrees or more?
- Have you temporarily lost your sense of taste or smell?

SoonerStart Families

When scheduling the in-person visit, staff will ask the family:

- Have you or anyone living in your home had close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 14 days?
- Are you or anyone living in your home currently ill? Do you or anyone living in your house have symptoms of a cold, cough, shortness of breath, chilling, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headaches, sore throat, congestion, or a temperature of 100 degrees or more?
- Have you temporarily lost your sense of taste or smell?

If the answer is “yes” to any of the above questions, the in-person visit cannot occur. A virtual visit may be conducted if “yes” has been selected on the contingency statement in the child’s IFSP. If the family has selected “No” on the contingency statement, SoonerStart staff will cancel the service visit and reschedule.

SoonerStart family members who report having COVID-19 like symptoms as described by the CDC or have tested positive for COVID-19 are required to self-isolate at home and cannot receive in-person services until:

- They have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without being given fever-reducing medications; **AND**
- has had improvement in symptoms **AND**
- at least ten days have passed since their symptoms first appeared.

Staff should advise SoonerStart family members to follow [CDC recommendations](#) for self-quarantining if those families report exposure to COVID-19 (within 6 feet of an individual with a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis).

SoonerStart Procedure Requirements During Phases I, II, III

SoonerStart will continue to follow all IDEA Part C and program procedures as outlined in the most recent version of the SoonerStart Operations Manual posted on the SoonerStart website.

SoonerStart cannot accept verbal consent for early intervention activities. Parent/Caregiver signatures are required on all consent forms for screenings, evaluations, IFSPs, Medicaid Consents, Releases of Information, and Electronic Communication.

PHASE I: VIRTUAL EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES

Trigger: Any county that is considered a “Red” county per Oklahoma’s COVID-19 Alert system

This High (red) risk phase means many COVID-19 positive cases are present in the community, with undetected cases likely. The risk of infection is heightened by community spread, and robust testing and containment measures are recommended to mitigate further spread.

During Phase I, intakes, eligibility evaluations, IFSP meetings and early intervention services will be provided virtually.

Eligibility evaluations should be completed using video conferencing technology. Telephone/audio only evaluations should not be conducted unless the family does not have the technology resources for video conferencing. The evaluation tool for virtual evaluations is the Developmental Profile 3 (DP3).

IFSP meetings may be completed by video conferencing or telephone with all members of the IFSP team participating. Virtual early intervention services should be conducted by video conferencing unless the family does not have the technology resources.

SoonerStart will provide only virtual services during any period that the family’s county of residence is at risk level Red (as indicated by the Oklahoma COVID-19 Alert System) if the family has agreed by selecting “yes” on the contingency statement in the child’s IFSP. If the family selects “No” on the contingency statement, SoonerStart staff will cancel the service visit until the county returns to orange, yellow, or green or an IFSP modification is complete.

PHASE II: IN-PERSON SERVICES WITH SAFETY PRECAUTIONS AND CONTINUED VIRTUAL VISITS

Trigger: Any county that is considered a “Yellow or Orange” county per Oklahoma’s COVID-19 Alert system

This low/moderate (Yellow/Orange) risk phase means COVID-19 positive cases are present in the community at an increased level, and the risk of infection is elevated. Viral testing and containment measures are able to identify most cases from a known source.

SoonerStart believes face-to-face services are the most effective means of providing SoonerStart services. Following all CDC Safety Recommendations, face-to-face services in the child’s natural environment (including evaluations and IFSP meetings) will be the priority for all services for yellow and orange designated counties. If the child’s natural environment presents safety concerns, the team, including the family, may discuss alternate environments or virtual alternatives. If a family requests virtual services, the program will prioritize videoconferencing. The use of telephone call or text as a means of providing services is considered a last resort option.

During Phase II

- SoonerStart will prioritize face-to-face services in the natural environments when possible.
- Use of auditory only or text services should be considered services of last resort.
- It is strongly advised that all face-to-face services be provided by SoonerStart staff/providers who are fully vaccinated.
- Staff and caregivers are required to wear a face mask when the meeting is face-to-face.
- Staff must practice social distancing as much as possible and practice hand washing before and after each visit.

Intakes may continue virtually or in-person during Phase II.

Eligibility evaluations should be completed in-person by a multidisciplinary team using either the BDI-2 or the DP3 and a second procedure to determine eligibility. In-person evaluations may be completed at the SoonerStart site location or in an alternate location including the family’s home. If the family cannot meet face-to-face and the family has video-conferencing capability, a virtual evaluation may be completed. The requirement

for a multidisciplinary team utilizing two procedures for eligibility determination remains the same.

IFSP meetings may be completed in person or virtually. When determining the location of services, the IFSP team should consider all natural-environment settings based on the family/child's unique needs and safety of the family and staff. These settings may include Health Department, contractor's office, childcare center, family's home, alternate outdoor locations or virtual video conferencing. Early Intervention services exclusively via telephone are not best practice. Services provided via telephone calls or texting only should be the last resort option and will be considered as "*other*" location. Justification for this option must be included on the IFSP. Periodic in-person services are recommended as an additional service delivery when families do not have the technology resources for video-conferencing.

The Resource Coordinator will obtain information on the family's technology resources, as well as other factors, including safety, that may affect service delivery options, for consideration by the evaluation team and/or IFSP team.

PHASE III: IN-PERSON SERVICES, OPTIONAL VIRTUAL SERVICES

Trigger: Any county that is considered a “Green” county per Oklahoma’s COVID-19 Alert system

This New Normal (Green) risk phase means COVID-19 positive cases are presently at a manageable level in the community. While risk of infection is present, viral testing and containment measures can be used to monitor and control the virus. During Phase III, in-person services are available to ANY family requesting face-to-face visits. Virtual visits via video conferencing will continue to be available as an option for early intervention service provider visits, however, eligibility evaluations and IFSP meetings will be conducted in-person with the child and family.

The Resource Coordinator will continue to monitor IFSP outcomes and service deliveries for each family on their caseload. An IFSP team meeting will be scheduled with families requesting to move from virtual services to in-person services to determine what modifications to the IFSP are needed. In-person visits will occur in natural environments.

Eligibility evaluations will be completed in-person by a multidisciplinary team using either the BDI-2 or the DP3 and a second procedure to determine eligibility. In-person evaluations may be completed at the SoonerStart site location or in an alternate location including the family’s home.

IFSP meetings will take place face-to-face. SoonerStart will prioritize in-person visits with families but the option of virtual early intervention service visits may continue as necessary if allowed by the rules and regulations set forth by the Office of Special Education Programs and the Oklahoma Health Care Authority (OHCA).