

March 19, 2020

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## **Focus on Child Safety and Well-being is Paramount during Social Distancing**

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(Salem, Ore.) – Reduced contact with educators, medical professionals, and community members can impact children and families in many ways. During this time of social distancing, the Oregon Department of Human Services encourages Oregonians to check in with families and continue to engage with child welfare when appropriate.

“Our child welfare agency is a small part of a much larger system that focuses on child safety,” said Rebecca Jones Gaston, DHS Child Welfare Director. “During this very fluid situation, where there are more questions than answers, we are keeping child safety paramount in our work and want to reiterate our dedication to children and families.”

During this time, the DHS Child Welfare Program will continue to operate the 24/7 statewide Child Abuse hotline, respond to reports of abuse and neglect, and work with community partners to maintain support to families.

The COVID-19 pandemic creates many challenges for families, which could impact child safety, including:

- Lack of access to medical care
- Lack of face time with mandated reporters
- Limited access to regular meals due to school closures
- Known exposure to COVID-19 or symptomatic people
- In close contact with someone who is considered high risk if infected with COVID-19

DHS encourages community members to check in with at-risk families -- including young children, children and adults with developmental delays or other medical vulnerabilities, isolated children and families, and youth and families with severe emotional/mental health needs – through phone, email, or by safe distance.

“As we grapple with isolation and uncertainty, let’s connect with one other in safe ways to continue to build the connected, generous communities we all need,” said Becky Jones, Executive Director of Oregon Child Abuse Intervention Centers.

Sharing resource information for food banks, unemployment benefits, SNAP availability, and educational resources can be extremely helpful. If you suspect a child is being abused, please contact the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-855-503-(SAFE)7233.

More information for resources and support:

- 211info.org (also by dialing 211) offers connection to local and regional resources for food banks, housing assistance, and mental health services
- Lines for Life, a nonprofit dedicated to substance abuse and suicide prevention: 1-800-273-8255 or text '273Talk' to 839863

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