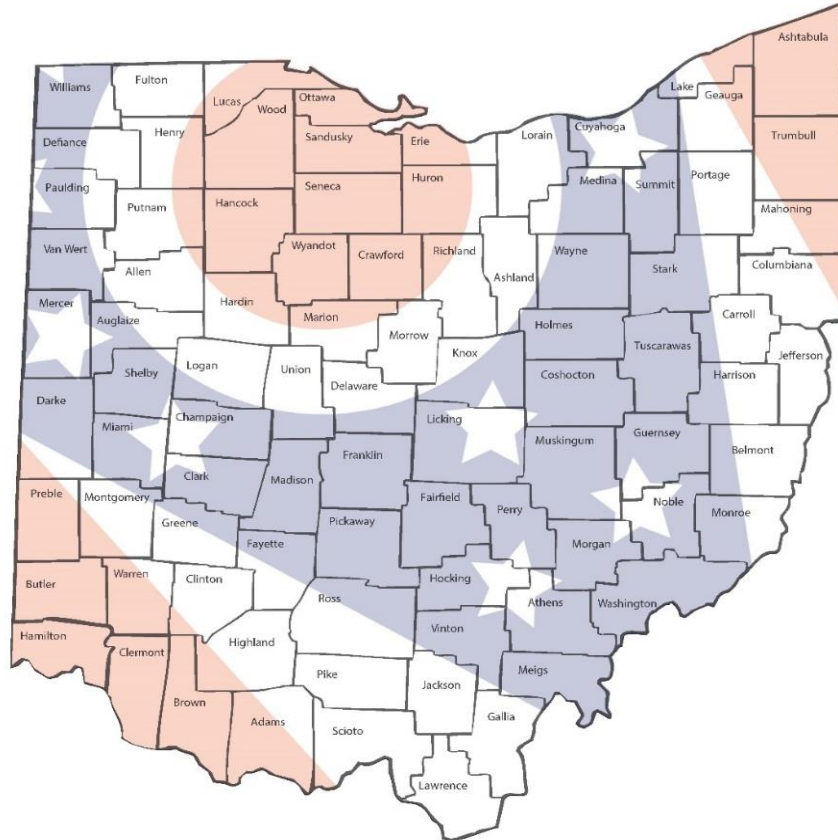


Appendix D

Ohio 2020-2024 Disaster Plan Update



**Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
Office of Families and Children**

May 9, 2022

Introduction

Up until April of 2020, Ohio counties have only faced several natural disasters and operational emergencies, including flooding, tornadoes, and even a massive power outage that impacted multiple states. In March of 2020 a national pandemic occurred, the COVID-19 Pandemic, which resulted in a Stay at Home Order for all Ohio residents. The Stay at Home Order was issued effective on March 23, 2020, by the Governor of Ohio. This order closed all businesses, with exception being put into place for essential work and activities. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) was included in this exception due to the work being conducted is essential to assist families in Ohio in many different capacities.

Due to the COVID pandemic and Stay at Home orders issued by the Governor of Ohio, government staff at the county and state level are permitted to work remotely if their job responsibilities allow them to do so, as of June 2021. Ohio's Public Children Services Agencies staff who work directly with families have returned to their office. Procedure letters, memos on guidance for practice considerations, and bi-weekly teleconferences, throughout the pandemic, based on the Governor and the Department of Health's recommendations, have been provided to all state and county employees.

Being prepared for unplanned and sometimes catastrophic interruptions in business operations is critical for agencies providing basic health and safety services to children and families, as these agencies are often the first point of contact for displaced community members seeking assistance. Agencies must be supportive of the development of emergency preparedness plan for childcare providers; and the safety and needs of children and their parents or legal guardians when separated due to disaster and significant numbers of children have become separated from parents/legal guardian. In addition, ODJFS has learned as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, it is necessary to develop unique practices, policies, procedures, and processes to ensure families continue to be served safely by the children services system. In addition to serving the families of Ohio, ODJFS ensured the safety of employees serving Ohio citizens, while following the guidance set forth by the Governor of Ohio's Stay at Home Order as a result of COVID-19. During these unplanned emergencies, ODJFS is required to provide guidance to state and local agencies by revising rules, processes, and procedures to ensure compliance with rule in order to meet compliance guidelines and ensure the safety of families.

In Ohio, direct services for child protection, e.g., assessment/investigation, foster care and in-home supportive services to children and families, are provided by county public children services agencies (PCSAs). In addition, ODJFS licenses private child placing agencies (PCPAs); group homes; children's residential centers (CRCs); and private non-custodial agencies (PNAs) to provide substitute care and adoption services. ODJFS has statutory responsibility to promulgate rules via the Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) and provide oversight of PCSAs, PCPAs, group homes, CRCs and PNAs to ensure rule compliance. The activities conducted by ODJFS with direct impact on the child protective services (CPS) system's clients include: processing Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) paperwork; conducting searches of the Central Registry in compliance with the Adam Walsh Act and to assist other states' CPS agencies with assessment/investigation activities; ongoing case services; operating the Putative Father Registry;

and providing technical assistance to agencies and customer service for the general public via the Office for Families and Children (OFC) Help Desk.

Section 422(b)(16)(A)-(E) of the Social Security Act requires that states' disaster preparedness and recovery plans (henceforth, disaster plans) do all of the following:

- *Identify, locate, and continue availability of services for children under state care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster;*
- *Respond to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster, and provide services in those cases;*
- *Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster; and*
- *Coordinate services and share information with other states.*

As a state supervised, county administered child protective services (CPS) system, planning for disaster response and recovery in Ohio occurs at both the state and county levels. Plans to ensure continuity of critical direct child protection services interrupted by an emergency or disaster are developed by PCSAs in collaboration with their local stakeholders and service providers. Private agencies holding custody of children placed in substitute care; CRCs and group homes with children in placement; and PNAs supervising licensed substitute care providers are also required to develop disaster plans to ensure continuity of services for children and families. Through OAC rule 5101:2-5-13.1, *Disaster Preparedness Plan Requirements*, ODJFS requires each agency under its purview to have specific policies in place related to agency operations, personnel practices, provision of services, etc. This rule also requires public and private agencies to develop a county and/or agency specific disaster plan in cooperation with key stakeholders and service providers (e.g., caregivers, families, other agencies, courts, shelters).

Locating missing children and reuniting minors with their parent/guardian will be a priority. The most effective method to reunite children is to provide efficient and coordinated family reunification programs with a goal to deliver reunification services and support to survivors and their families. The agency that has the lead for reunification of children (depending on where the disaster occurs) will coordinate its efforts and requests for resources (such as the National Emergency Child Locator Center) with the lead agency coordination overall reunification operations. Reunification support teams may be assembled to assess reunification needs and to support multi-agency coordination, information sharing and other reunification operations.

Areas that must be addressed in an agency's disaster preparedness plan include, roles and responsibilities of organizations and agencies that partner for this plan. The plan is intended to be scalable to meet the requirements of varying levels of need and response and include, but are not limited to:

- Identification of essential personnel needed for the operation of the agency.
- Identification of any health concerns which will need to be addressed to ensure employee safety (i.e., Stay at Home Order as a result of a virus).
- Identification of necessary travel and restrictions related to travel.

- Alternative physical work location (provisions for temporary work sites).
- Communication plan for agency staff, substitute caregivers, and other critical team members – with or without e-mail, internet, Ohio SACWIS, or telephone access.
- Identification of essential work activities that must continue in order to ensure child safety and support caregivers, youth, and service providers.
- Procedures for handling new reports of child maltreatment.
- Procedures for how assessments/investigations will be completed.
- Procedures for tracking clients and substitute caregivers (with or without Ohio SACWIS or other technical systems in place).
- Continuity of services to families receiving in-home supportive services.
- Continuity of services to children in substitute care and kinship care placements.
- Maintenance and security of agency records not included in Ohio SACWIS including soft copies stored in other software applications and hard copies.
- Maintenance and security of court records for child protective services cases and PCPA adoption court records.
- Coordination of services with law enforcement, hospitals/medical providers, schools, appropriate agencies, voluntary organizations, and the private sector to understand and define respective reunification roles, responsibilities, capabilities, capacity of their jurisdictions or other disaster response agencies:
 - Children in agency custody.
 - Children with no known or available parent, guardian, or custodian.
- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities for agencies and organizations that are responsible for the temporary care of children (educational, childcare, medical, foster care, juvenile justice, and recreational facilities) will be established prior to the need to activate this plan.
- Working with emergency shelters:
 - Staff training in disaster preparedness.
 - Coordination of services for children and families in emergency shelters (physical location; shared responsibilities).
 - Working with volunteers.
- Protocols to share information among agencies/organizations and neighboring counties providing reunification services will have been developed through MOUs.
- Coordinate and facilitate multi-agency family reunification response operations.

Plans developed by PCPAs, PNAs, CRCs and group homes must address, at a minimum:

- Identification of essential personnel needed for the operation of the agency.
- Identification of an alternative physical work location including provisions for temporary work sites.
- Communication plan for agency staff, substitute caregivers, facility staff (if applicable) and other critical team members.
- Identification of essential work activities that must continue in order to ensure child safety and support caregivers, facility staff (if applicable), youth and service providers.
- Procedures for tracking clients and substitute caregivers.
- Continuity of services to children in substitute care.

- Maintenance and security of agency records.

Much of the work of public and private agencies providing direct services is dependent upon or supported by state procedures and systems. Because of this, ODJFS must have disaster recovery strategies in place that are specific to ODJFS, and concurrently have protocols and procedures in place to assist and support agencies' disaster plans. The disaster recovery strategies to support public and private agencies providing children services are outlined in this document under the following headings:

- *Continuity of required ODJFS activities.*
- *Maintenance of children services records that are included in Ohio SACWIS.*
- *Physical work location for state CPS program staff.*
- *Essential OFC operations.*
- *Continuity of services and/or provision of services for children placed out of or into Ohio as a result of a natural disaster (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children - ICPC).*
- *Intrastate/interstate communication system.*
- *Media communication plans.*

Continuity of Required ODJFS Activities

ODJFS internal policy IPP .10101, *Information Hotline and RPX Notifier for Emergency Communications* was revised on June 1, 2015, to inform ODJFS employees about emergency communications policies and procedures regarding the dissemination of information related to weather and non-weather-related emergencies and/or declared disasters. The policy applies to all staff employed by ODJFS and includes provisions for communicating essential information to ODJFS staff and contractors in order to maintain Business Continuity within ODJFS facilities or in support of ODJFS service delivery.

ODJFS Central Office, located primarily in Columbus, Ohio, has multiple work sites that can be utilized in the event that a specific work location is inaccessible. Staff working in regionally located field offices have the ability to work from home and/or Central Office work sites should the need arise.

Maintenance of Children Services Records that are Included in Ohio SACWIS

Ohio completed full implementation of the statewide automated child welfare information system (Ohio SACWIS) in 2008. Since that time, information previously maintained in accordance with internal local agency procedures and available solely through agency hard copy files and computer systems has been housed in a computer system operated and maintained by ODJFS. As a result, ODJFS has responsibility for ensuring continued availability of case record and provider information housed in Ohio SACWIS; as well as ensuring the PCSAs are able to enter new referrals and document the assessment/investigation activities on new child maltreatment reports.

Ohio's SACWIS application is web-based, and therefore, accessible from any location via the internet. Currently, the Ohio SACWIS production system resides in a secure facility called the State of Ohio Computer Center (i.e., The SOCC). This facility offers the system 24x7x365 on-site security and a 24-hour battery-based back up and a 72-hour diesel-based backup. There are redundant network connections to the building as well as 24x7x365 support staff on-site.

From a systems perspective, the production environment is architected for high-availability with server clusters housing the presentation, business, and database tiers of the application. Each of these tiers is horizontally scalable and offers failover within the respective clusters. The database tiers are segregated into a processing and a data tier with the processing tiers running in the cluster and the data residing on a storage area network.

There is a secondary live backup of data to a read-only instance within the storage area network that could be used in case of emergency. The data from the storage area network is backed up to disk with a daily incremental backup and a monthly backup. These disk backups are stored offsite in a secured location and a reasonable distance from the SOCC.

Physical Work Location for State CPS Program Staff

The ODJFS Office of Families and Children (OFC) Senior Management Team has identified its role in maintaining essential functions during an emergency business interruption. Staff have been designated as essential and non-essential based on the anticipated need for continuity or immediate resumption of the job tasks performed. It is understood that staff in some units may need to be temporarily re-assigned to different work responsibilities in order to resume or maintain operation of essential functions following an emergency business interruption.

The ODJFS internal e-mail application is accessible via the internet. OFC has developed a phone tree comprised of all employees with primary and emergency contact information. If staff cannot report to their assigned physical work locations, OFC Senior Management will initiate use of the OFC phone tree; and issue “all-staff” e-mails as appropriate.

Essential OFC Operations

A plan for continuity of internal and external communications following a disaster or other emergency has also been developed by OFC administration. In the event of an emergency business interruption, OFC has identified the following work activities as essential functions:

- Provision of telephone technical assistance to counties and private agencies (all Bureaus in their areas of expertise);
- Investigations of foster care facilities;
- Investigation of residential facilities;
- Investigations of licensed group homes;
- Payment of reimbursement claims from counties and private agencies and processing of adoption assistance payments;
- Processing ICPC cases, and Central Registry and Putative Father requests;

- Processing public information and legislative requests.

Licensed foster homes, group homes, CRCs, and adoptive homes with current placements (i.e., adoption is not yet finalized) that relocate or experience a change in household composition as a result of a disaster, are subject to an assessment of their compliance with the site and safety requirements outlined in OAC rule. The recommending agency (public or private) is responsible for conducting the site and safety assessments, however, there may be certain requirements that ODJFS would adjust (e.g., time frames) in order to assist with continuity of services and prevent placement disruptions.

Foster homes, adoptive homes and residential facilities with current placements that experience a change in household composition or relocate as a result of a disaster or other emergency are subject to a re-assessment of their compliance with OAC rule requirements (particularly, occupancy, sleeping arrangements, site and safety requirements, and staffing, if applicable). If the foster or adoptive home becomes uninhabitable for any reason, OAC rules require that the caregiver notify the recommending agency (PCSA, PCPA or PNA) and any agency which has placed a child in the home, of the situation within twenty-four hours. The recommending agency (public or private) is then responsible for assessing the caregiver's continued compliance with licensing rules. Again, ODJFS may have to work with an agency to adjust certain requirements for a limited time period in order to support the agency's efforts to ensure continuity of services to children in care and prevent placement disruptions.

Pursuant to OAC rule 5101:2-9-07 *Emergency planning and preparedness*, residential facilities, e.g., group homes and CRCs, are required to develop and implement a set of written procedures for staff and residents to follow in emergencies and disasters. These procedures must be developed in consultation with, and approved by, a local or state fire inspector, and include specific instructions and procedures for the evacuation of buildings, the assignment of staff during emergencies, and a contingency plan for the care of residents who have been evacuated. If the residential facility cares for children who are physically or emotionally handicapped, the facility emergency procedures must also include specific instructions as to the evacuation of these children.

Processing of the Ohio SACWIS Alleged Perpetrator Search (OSAPS) and Putative Father Registry (PFR) searches are essential OFC functions, each with an identified downtime tolerance of two to five days. A database tracks all OSAPS requests and are stored on a shared network drive. The PFR database is a web-based application. OSAPS requests are submitted primarily via the OSAPS on-line system, but may be submitted in rare circumstances via e-mail, fax, U.S. mail or delivery service. PFR registrations and search requests may be entered by individuals using the on-line system or sent to ODJFS via U.S. mail. Information submitted by U.S. mail, delivery service or fax is entered into the appropriate database on the date of receipt. As a result, damage to hard copy files and documentation does not automatically equate to loss of the information needed to process the search requests. Ohio SACWIS access is required to conduct alleged perpetrator searches. With internet access, work for both programs can be resumed or maintained using paper forms, fax, mail, e-mail, and telephone; and can be completed at an alternative work location.

Continuity of Services and/or Provision of Services for Children Placed Out of or into Ohio as a Result of a Natural Disaster (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children – ICPC)

As an OFC function directly impacting the safety and timeliness of children’s placements, ICPC operations will be a primary focus for business resumption activities following a disaster or other emergency. OFC program staff has identified a recovery time objective (downtime tolerance) for ICPC of two to five days.

Work tasks associated with processing ICPC cases are completed within the Ohio SACWIS application. While the work can continue on paper, if the Ohio SACWIS application is unavailable, efficiency and timeliness will be negatively impacted.

The ICPC program can utilize paper forms to resume or maintain operations. Therefore, the program can function at an alternative work site with phone, fax, mail service, computers or laptops, and internet access.

Work tasks associated with processing ICPC cases are completed within the Ohio SACWIS application. While the work can continue on paper, if the Ohio SACWIS application is unavailable, efficiency and timeliness will be negatively impacted.

All work for ICPC is completed electronically. There are no paper documents at all. All paper documentation that existed previously is now stored in FileNet. All current cases have their documentation in Ohio SACWIS. All communication and sending/receiving of documents are completed electronically – either through the NEICE system (from Ohio SACWIS) or through email.

If the Ohio SACWIS system were to go down, but the email system was working, ICPC work could be completed via email until Ohio SACWIS is back up. Electronic documents could be stored in the secure ICPC folders on the private R drive (assuming it was accessible) until Ohio SACWIS is available again.

ICPC Staff currently work fully remotely, so they have all the equipment needed to work remotely – laptops, Jabber program for phone calls, and Teams program for calls/meetings/messages. No printers or scanners are needed or used. As long as Wi-Fi is available, work can continue.

Intrastate/Interstate Communication System

The OFC Help Desk will continue to serve as the centralized point of contact for the public, as well as public and private agencies seeking technical assistance or guidance following a disaster or other emergency business interruption. The Help Desk staff is able to respond to inquiries and provide assistance for all programs within OFC; and collaborates with staff from all of the various OFC Bureaus as needed.

Daily Help Desk functions will be essential in the event of a disaster or other emergency business interruption, and the recovery time objective has been identified as less than four hours. Operational needs for continuity of Help Desk functions are phone, fax, e- mail, computers or laptops, and

internet access. Work can be conducted at alternative sites. It is likely that staff from other programs would be temporarily re-assigned to the Help Desk to assist with anticipated workload increases following a disaster or other emergency.

The OFC Help Desk is accessible by phone: (614) 466-0978 or (800) 686-1580 (select option #2) or e-mail at: (OIS_SERVICE_DESK@jfs.ohio.gov).

Media Communication Plans

In response to a disaster situation, ODJFS Office of Communications would be responsible for identifying the most appropriate method of releasing information to the media. Communications works directly with the management team of the affected Offices to determine the information and details that will be released.

Pursuant to ODJFS Internal Policy and Procedure (IPP) #11001 *Office of Communications and Responsibilities*:

1. All media requests must be referred to the Office of Communications. Even though various ODJFS program areas may occasionally receive media requests, they must refer all media requests to the Office of Communications so that the Office of Communications can respond to the request appropriately.
2. The Office of Communications is responsible for the accurate dissemination of information to the media and will respond to all media requests in a timely manner. The Office of Communications also will determine how best to provide the information requested (for example, in person, via telephone or by email).
3. Unless approved by the Deputy Director of Communications or the ODJFS Director, only staff whose specific job duties include responding to the media will respond to media requests. This includes responding in writing, verbally, electronically, by mail or in any other form. No information will be provided to any local, state and/or national media outlets or to representatives of such outlets without permission from the ODJFS Deputy Director of Communications or the ODJFS Director, unless it falls within the responding person's stated job duties.

Disaster Plan Utilization

In April of 2020, the Governor of Ohio issued a Stay at Home order due to the COVID-19 virus Pandemic. As a result of this ordinance, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Service (ODJFS) was instructed to utilize the agency's Disaster Plan. The Disaster Plan while not specific to a virus pandemic was effective in the outlining of essential staff and work necessary to continue the work within ODJFS.

The Ohio Stay at Home ordinance affected all residents and businesses. Due to the limited ability for contact due to concerns of the COVID-19 virus spreading, ODJFS issued a variety of publications, procedures, processes, and protocols to ensure compliance with rules and policies. The below areas were impacted:

- *Continuity of required ODJFS activities.*
- *Maintenance of children services records that are included in Ohio SACWIS.*
- *Physical work location for state CPS program staff.*
- *Essential OFC operations.*
- *Continuity of services and/or provision of services for children placed out of or into Ohio as a result of a natural disaster (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children - ICPC).*
- *Intrastate/interstate communication system.*
- *Media communication plans.*

Consistent communication with all branches of ODJFS, PCSAs and related agencies were provided with detailed instruction and support from the initiation of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Stay at Home Order throughout the period of time the ordinance remained in place. The following include communications, rule modifications, publications, procedures, processes, and/or protocols issued during the COVID-19 Pandemic which impacted the ODJFS and PCSA workforce:

- Memo – Practice Considerations During COVID-19
 - JFS Coronavirus Q & A webpage
 - COVID-19 Home Visiting Screening Flowchart
 - Communication from the Office of Information Services regarding remote productivity tools available to staff – Remote Work Data Security Memo
 - COVID -19 letter to child welfare leaders
 - Child Service Practice Guidance – Federal Update for public and private entities
 - Caseworker Visits
 - Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plans
 - Other Legislative and Regulatory Flexibility
 - Child and Adult Protective Services
 - Screening instructions
 - Assessments/Investigations instructions
 - Open, Ongoing Cases
 - Visits
 - In Home Cases
 - Visits for Custody Cases with PCSA
 - Visitation with Family Members
 - Other Considerations included were:
 - Home Studies/Assessments
 - Medical/Health Requirements
 - Case Plan Requirements
 - Team Meetings
 - Juvenile Court Hearing and Orders
 - Local Service Provider Planning
 - Foster Parent Training/Certification/Re-Certification
 - PCSA Caseworker/Supervisor Training Requirements
- COVID -19 Resources for Child Welfare Professionals and Caregivers

- New Child Welfare Policy Many QA: MCV and Video Conferencing
- Child Welfare Policy Manual to permit agencies to use videoconferencing to meet the title IV-B monthly caseworker visit requirement
- HR 6201 – Impact of unemployment related to COVID – 19
 - Unemployment Direct Impact Provisions
 - Associated Employee Time Off Provisions in the Bill
 - Office of Family Assistance Provisions
 - ODJFS General Provisions
- COVID -19 Webpage was developed
- OCWTP/OHSTS Regional Training Center Status Updates Memo
- Emergency COVID-19 legislation – House Bill 197
- Guidance to Local Courts – Juvenile Courts impact on PCSA hearings
- Memo on the Limited Ability to Place Children due to COVID-19
- Memo regarding the CARES ACT and summary for impacted area
- Memo from Department of Health & Human Services regarding waiving statutorily required judicial proceedings
- Memo regarding COVID-19 pandemic guidance – Procedure Letter No. 348
 - COVID-19 positive result notification
 - Child Protection Oversight and Evaluation
 - Foster Care, Adoption, Kinship Care and Residential Facility Guidance
- Memo from Administration for Children and Families regarding grant flexibilities in conducting human service activities related to or affected by COVID-19
- Memo regarding Funding Clarifications and COVID-19 Response – Best Practice and Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention Allocations
- Memo regarding Bridges Flexibility Guidelines for COVID-19
- Memo regarding Increase in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage due to COVID-19
- Memo on Navigating Dependency Cases During the COVID-19 Crisis – opportunity to participate in a webinar on conducting hearings, worker visits and parent visitations
- Memo regarding Adult Protective Service for COVID-19 guidance
- Memo regarding Temporary Waiver Considerations for Residential Facilities to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Letter with guidance for virtual visitation with families
- Memo – Policy and Practice Guidance Document #001 Additional Practice Considerations During COVID-19
- Webinar office on Parenting Time During COVID-19: Strategically Using In-Person and Virtual Visits
- Bi-Weekly Webinars held with PCSAs, IV-E Courts and Private Agencies were provided by the Office of Families and Children to answer any questions due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and related services of each entity
- Informational updates regarding COVID vaccination and availability for community and staff at ODJFS continue to be provided as information is passed from the Governor and the Health Department

The Disaster Plan as written was effective in managing ODJFS employees and Ohio's PCSAs who serve families. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic being an unprecedented event with a Stay at Home Order put into place, guidance was provided based on information passed down from the Health Department and Ohio's Governor. On June 2, 2021, Ohio's Governor announced that all pandemic health orders, except for nursing homes and assisted living facilities, are no longer in place.