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Authorized Signature

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Issue Date: 09/25/2009

Topic: Other

Subject: H1N1 Guidance

Applies to (check all that apply):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> All DHS employees | <input type="checkbox"/> County Mental Health Directors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Area Agencies on Aging | <input type="checkbox"/> Health Services |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Children, Adults and Families | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Seniors and People with Disabilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County DD Program Managers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): |

Message:

As we move into the flu season, including anticipation of the potential widespread impacts from the H1N1 (sometimes referred to as swine flu) virus, it is important we take as many actions as possible to ensure client and staff health are safeguarded. With that concern we have prepared this IM to highlight actions you are currently able to take to reduce the need for client office visits, as well as how to treat clients who are unable to participate in JOBS related activities. As with any potential emergency, we must seek to balance our desire to provide critical client services with the need to also ensure staff are safeguarded.

Additional planning/response strategy efforts are also currently underway and those plans will be communicated in future IMs as well as through other communication/training processes.

H1N1 Pandemic Information

The World Health Organization declared a pandemic for the H1N1 flu (formerly called "swine flu") in June. The virus continues to spread worldwide, and the federal government predicts that absentee rates could be as high as 40 percent. Given the real possibility of widespread cases of H1N1, we will take a proactive approach to minimize the flu's effects on our ability to fulfill our core mission.

Here is some information on current policy and things that can be done prior to waivers being implemented. There are waivers the program is applying for prior to staffing level

issues and waivers we are requesting to implement only if staffing levels fall below the minimum necessary to perform mission critical functions.

Office Visits

While we cannot close the doors to the offices without official approval and direction, we can conduct business by phone, mail, fax and drop off.

Waiving Face to Face

SNAP (Food Stamps), TANF and TA-DVS: Waiving of the face-to-face interviews is currently allowable by policy. An interview is required of all households applying for SNAP, TANF, and TA-DVS benefits. This will not change; the interview may be conducted face-to-face or via telephone. The face-to-face interview can be waived at either initial certification or at recertification. Staff must narrate the reason the face-to-face has been waived. *(Note: there are some pilot areas that currently are under waiver to not narrate the reason for the waiver of the face-to-face interview. These offices will continue operating under this documented waiver).*

Applications

Offices must ensure the application process is not a barrier to people trying to access benefits. Some people who will still need to come into the office to get applications, so we must ensure we have processes in place for this.

- Applicants/recipients may request applications in a variety of ways:
 - they may walk into the office and ask for an application;
 - they may call on the telephone and ask that an application be mailed to them;
 - they may ask that an application be faxed to them;
 - they may pull the application off of the web, fill it out and print it
 - they may request an application via e-mail.
- All applications may be returned to the local offices in multiple ways:
 - Drop off - either in the office or a drop box;
 - Mail;
 - Fax;
 - E-mail if the application is scanned and sent in.
- TA-DVS: it is recommended local domestic violence service providers be notified if there is a temporary change in procedure so they can help facilitate the application process for TA-DVS applicants in crisis.

Note: while applications can be requested by clients to be sent to them via e-mail, it is not recommended that normal business be conducted via e-mail due to security, privacy and confidentiality concerns. If you have questions about this, please contact the appropriate program policy.

Filing Date/Date of Request

- For all programs, filing dates and dates of request will be set the same way they currently are. The filing date is established when the department receives a request for SNAP benefits which includes a name, address and signature. This can be done in person, by mail or via fax. Filing dates may not be set via e-mail, as a signature is needed. The current process for setting dates of request will not change.

Note - TA-DVS applicants must have safety assessed within eight working hours of contact. The minimum response by DHS should be to assess whether the applicant has a safe place to stay until the application can be processed or arrangements made for shelter or hotel.

EBT/ID

- Sometimes a client or their alternate payee cannot come to the office to get their EBT card or their PIN. Under no circumstances should a PIN ever be released to another person (even if in the same filing group).
- EBT cards can be issued through the mail to clients who cannot or do not wish to come to the office. The procedure for this is located in the Business Procedures Manual and the Support Staff Assistance Manual.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – potential waivers

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) may be able to implement special waivers if the pandemic H1N1 flu causes significant absenteeism. If staffing levels in your office fall below the minimum necessary to perform mission critical functions due to the pandemic H1N1 flu, Self Sufficiency Programs (SSP) and Seniors and People with Disabilities (SPD) programs still need to be administered, even if there is a need to alter the *normal* daily business procedures.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is preparing to ask the federal government for several different waivers from Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) for SNAP. These waivers will allow the SNAP program to be flexible in the way benefits are accessed and ease the burden on clients and offices alike.

Offices will be notified of waiver approvals and implementation by Central Office. These waivers cannot be implemented in the local offices until notification from Central Office is received.

Waivers can include:

- Using the Date of Request as a Filing Date;
- Certification period extension (requires system changes – we are working with the Office of Information Services (OIS) to see if this can be done);
- Interim Report processing extension, only for interim reports received after the waiver is in place - (requires system changes – we are checking to see if this can be done);

- Allowing more than 10 days to process changes;
- Extending the time clients have to make change reports;
- Not requiring staff to narrate the reason for phone interviews.

Central Office Staff will work closely with Field Services to monitor staffing levels. This will allow us to communicate and identify areas that would not meet critical staffing levels. DHS would request waivers for SNAP, and based on approval an Action Request will be sent out statewide. Such an Action Request will notify staff of the specific areas the waiver covers and actions that need to be taken to implement the waiver. Online training will be delivered to these areas in order to ensure proper implementation of waivers and delivery of services.

Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) Participation for TANF Clients

Lack of attendance/participation due to H1N1 qualifies as an excused absence.

If a number of clients are participating at a contracted site, the procedures of the JOBS service provider should be followed. For example, if a school, work site, contractor, or other service provider takes action in response to the flu, such as closing or taking other precautions, then the JOBS clients assigned to that agency should follow their procedures. Contracted providers should notify the district; clients should inform their case manager. Whenever possible, other activities should be available in other smaller, offsite locations when the client is not ill. Any missed attendance under these circumstances should be excused. Please notify Central Office if JOBS sites close.

If you have any questions about this information, contact:

Contact(s):	Any questions should be directed to your regular contact for the appropriate program area.		
Phone:		Fax:	
E-mail:			