



**Continuing Challenges for Hospital Access
for Supports for People with Disabilities**

Despite the change in guidance from the RI Department of Health to allow a person with a disability to be accompanied by someone providing necessary supports, some hospitals have recently denied access to family members and support staff. We recognize this is a vital issue. We continue to educate hospital staff in understanding the rights and needs of people with disabilities, as well as the benefits of these supports to the individual, the quality of care they receive, and even to the hospital staff themselves.

The RI Department of Health’s guidance is attached to this bulletin. The guidance states that:

“When a support person is essential to the care of a patient with a disability, including patients who have altered mental status, communication barriers, or behavioral concerns (such as patients with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD), dementia, and/or behavioral health needs), accommodations for the patient should be made so that the patient can be accompanied by the support person. These accommodations can facilitate communication with hospital staff, accessibility, equal access to treatment and/or the provision of informed consent in accordance with the civil rights of patients with disabilities.”

A support person may include:

- a family member,
- guardian,
- community support provider,
- peer support specialist, or
- personal care attendant

We are continuing to work with advocacy organizations, the Department of Health, and the hospitals to educate hospital staff on this guidance and determine a way to consistently implement it. If you experience this issue, please contact the Division.

New! Drop Box for Hand-Delivered Documents

BHDDH has changed how documents are delivered to the department. If you are going to drop off an application, letter, or other document at the Division, please enter through the accessible entrance in the back of the building and leave it in a locked drop box in the elevator lobby area Monday – Friday between 8:30 AM and 4:00 PM.

Disability Rights
RHODE ISLAND

**DRRI Seeks Community
Input on Hospital Policy**

At this time, DRRI has been contacted by multiple advocates and family members regarding instances in which the hospital visitation policy has been violated, and hospitals have not allowed support persons to accompany people with disabilities.

If this has happened to you or someone you know, please call us at Disability Rights Rhode Island, **401-831-3150** or email us at contact@drri.org

We are advocating on your behalf and would like to speak with you.

Some BHDDH Staff on Reduced Work Week

Please be aware that some DDD social caseworkers and other BHDDH staff are participating in the State's WorkShare program and will be working only 3 days per week. Participants will be working 3 days per week (60 percent of their regular weekly hours) from Sunday, June 14, 2020 to Saturday, September 5, 2020. WorkShare is a voluntary alternative to help the state address the budget issues from the COVID crisis and assist with budget challenges in the coming weeks and months.

BHDDH will ensure that all imminent and emergency needs are met by other staff on days when your social caseworker is out. However, you may experience delays in your caseworker's response time for questions and other non-emergency needs. We ask for your patience this summer as we continue to deal with the impact of COVID-19.

It is very important that anyone contacting the Division continue to use the central phone number. Please call the **main phone number at (401) 462-3421** or call the **Spanish line at (401) 462-3014** during normal business hours of Monday – Friday, 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM.

Can ISP meetings be held remotely?

Yes. Virtual meetings are allowed for the development of new ISPs. Attendees do not need to sign in whether the ISP meeting takes place virtually or in person, but an attendance list is required to be submitted with the plan. The guidelines for who should be included in a virtual meeting are the same as for in-person meetings.

If the participant, plan writer, and others who are invited to the ISP meeting agree, meetings can also begin to be held in person with appropriate safety measures like masks. The current COVID guidance is to limit gatherings to no more than 15 people. Most ISP meetings have less than 15 people. If privacy and confidentiality can be assured, meetings could be held outside.

Why do recommendations about how to cope with COVID change?

It can be very frustrating when the advice about COVID changes. COVID-19 is a new disease and what we know about it is changing rapidly.

Scientists studying COVID and public health officials trying to keep people safe are working with both lab findings and real-world implications. An example is how long the virus can be detected on a surface in a lab versus the evaluation of what amount of virus on a surface is enough to cause infection. Scientists can test things in the lab faster than they can evaluate what it means for the public.

Most revised recommendations have been the result of new and better information. Wearing masks is an example. As evidence grew that COVID could be spread by people who don't have any symptoms, it became clear that infections can be reduced if people wear masks when they are within six feet of one another, particularly indoors. The change in the recommendation was an improvement, not correction of a mistake.

What do we now know about COVID-19?

Six months into the coronavirus crisis, we know more about how people become infected. Scientists have found that, while possible, it isn't common to get COVID-19 from a contaminated surface like a cardboard box. And brief encounters with people outdoors are unlikely to spread COVID. Instead, the major cause is close-up, person-to-person interactions for extended periods.

The risk is increased in crowded events, poorly ventilated areas, and places where people are talking loudly or breathing heavily, such as gyms, musical performances, weddings and birthday parties. One of the worst cases of spreading COVID happened in a church choir, where 53 of 61 people were infected in one rehearsal. Choir members were close together in a small space and singing loudly. Singing or talking loudly releases more droplets from your breath into the air, and these droplets travel farther.

Think about the difference between exhaling normally as you breathe, like when you're sitting quietly, and exhaling to blow out candles on your birthday cake, when you blow more air that goes farther and faster than your normal breathing. If you were outside when you blew out the candles, the wind would scatter the droplets from your breath faster than if you were inside, so it's harder for COVID to spread to other people. Though even outdoors, prolonged close contact or a sneeze in the face can spread COVID.

Wearing a face mask in public is the most effective way to prevent transmission and, along with social distancing, is the most likely opportunity to stop the pandemic.

How is this information going to help the DD system?

The system will look different going forward. We need to think about how to reopen while protecting everyone's health. The best ways we know right now for staying safe are physical distancing and masks, and reducing the number of gatherings in enclosed spaces. Tactics that will help us include things like installing plexiglass barriers, curbside pickup from stores, requiring people to wear masks in stores and other indoor places, using good ventilation systems, keeping windows open when possible, and doing more activities outside and in small groups. We need to think about other innovative ways to do the things we need to do.

We also need to keep up with widespread testing, contact tracing, and isolation of people who are sick or have been exposed. If the number of COVID-19 cases starts to rise again as the State reopens, more extensive efforts like staying home may be needed again. But we're learning more every day, and other, better tactics might also be identified in the coming months as we continue to deal with COVID.

If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions about reopening, please share them with your social caseworker or email BHDDH.AskDD@bhddh.ri.gov.

Poster Illustration Created By: Marisol Ortega |



Mapping the Disability Experience: Share Your Stories

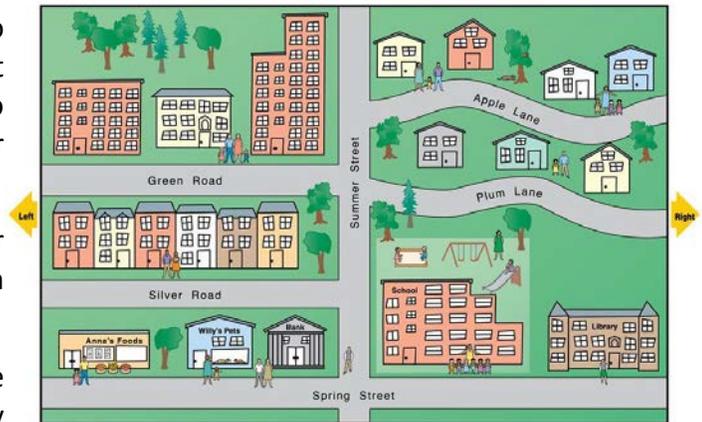
Many people's daily lives changed with the due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The University of Illinois at Chicago Department of Disability and Human Development invites you to draw a map of your neighborhood to capture how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted (or not) your use and understanding of space.

This can include drawings/images of your home, your neighborhood, your city or beyond. Maps can come in many forms, styles, perspectives, and mediums.

Researchers plan to share these maps through an online public display as a project aimed at capturing community knowledge, shared experiences, and creative expression.

Submissions will be accepted on a rolling basis through June 30, 2020. Please share your maps using this link: https://uic.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9LGsseOd5Jnv2Ch.

Neighborhood Map



COVID-19 Resources from the Institute for Community Inclusion



The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI), at UMass Boston, has released a series of resources on the provision of employment services and supports during the COVID-19 pandemic. **All products are available at the ICI COVID-19 product and resource page:** <https://covid19.communityinclusion.org/>

These tools can be downloaded for free. They include a variety of practical strategies and resources that can be used by service providers, families, individuals, educators, and others, to ensure ongoing supports for individuals to be fully included in employment, education, and the community, while managing the impact of COVID-19.

Silver Linings

Spread Kindness in Coventry

The Coventry Substance Abuse Task Force along with the Coventry Police Department has put up new signs throughout the town with positive messages. In their words, "Now more than ever we need to remember to be kind to one another and focus on our own mental health as well!"

"These amazing signs were created to help spread some positivity and kindness in our community, despite the trying times many of us are dealing with currently."

If you live in Coventry and would like a sign in front of your house or business, please text Katelyn Bianco at 401-529-5216.



Rock Solid: Life Choices, RIDDC, Carve Out Success

Excerpted from The Warwick Post, June 16, 2020 by Rob Borkowski

For full story see <https://warwickpost.com/rock-solid-life-choices-riddc-carve-out-success/>

Nic Votolato couldn't find a long-term, reliable place to work that satisfied his passion to contribute and socialize with others, said Nic's mom, Gail McCusker.

The Division of Developmental Disabilities' self-directed program empowers those who prefer designing, implementing and managing a service plan that suits them uniquely. Nic hired his life-long friend, Emily Susfoletti, to work for him to assist him with building his business and learning other important life skills.

In spring of 2019, Nic and Gail enrolled in the RIDDC's Self-Employment Business Incubator, which offers people with developmental disabilities classes to learn how to run their own businesses. This innovative project is funded by the Governor's Workforce Board and the Department of Labor and Training's "Real Pathways RI" employment initiative. Everyone who enrolls in the program needs to start out with an idea for their business. So they decided to pursue Nic's vocation, focused, at first, on his love of dogs.

Nic's love for dogs inspired his first product, a concrete dog bowl that dogs can't budge without significant effort. "We make dog bowls they don't tip over," Nic said. The solid stone creations were a boon for dog owners and the dogs themselves, and they were quite popular.

In April of 2019, the program also qualified Nic for a small grant he used to expand his product line into decorative garden stones. By the time Small Business Saturday SHOP RI was held in November, Nic had a newly expanded inventory of stone dog bowls and decorative garden stones. Nic set up a booth for Rock Solid Creations during Small Business Saturday at the Crowne Plaza in Warwick, selling his wares with hundreds of other small businesses and crafters. He sold out his entire inventory.

While Nic had plans to set up a table at the Gaspee Days Arts and Crafts Festival this year, the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted that along with the festival itself. But Nic has continued selling his dog bowls and garden stones online. Now, they have to ask customers pick up the items themselves, with little interaction. That's disappointing for Nic, who gets a thrill out of seeing people's faces when they're getting their first look at his work.

Nic and Emily are still working on new garden stones, sundials and other cement products together, and Gail helps too, including brainstorming other new ideas that will continue to build Nic's business.

You can see more of Nic's garden stones and other cement products on his Facebook Page, "Rock Solid Creations", or purchase them directly at "The Budding Violet" retail shop in North Smithfield, RI."



[CREDIT: Gail McCusker] Nic Votolato puts the finishing touches on a few dog bowls, the first items sold at Rock Solid Creations.

RIArts.org

The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) is working to provide information and resources for artists as well as working to spread the word about experiences for audiences to enjoy from home. The website riarts.org offers a calendar of both ongoing and one-time virtual events from Rhode Island artists and arts organizations. Events include both free events and events with a fee.

RISCA encourages you to participate in art making at home! Create and share family-friendly art - drawings, poetry, songs, essays, photographs, videos, or whatever your preferred medium - inspired by this unique and challenging period. Consider tagging your creation with #RIArts. Photos of artwork can be submitted online or mailed to RISCA. Visit riarts.org for more information.

HELP US FILL THE STATE WITH HOPE
#RIArts

Sample of Events

Virtual Knitting Circle - July 11 Join Trinity Rep and Providence Public Library for a Virtual Knitting Circle on July 11 at 11:00am. Bring your project online and enjoy the camaraderie and fun of knitting together from the comfort of your own home. We will be meeting via Zoom - to receive the link - please RSVP to this event and it will be sent prior to our meeting. Visit Facebook Events to RSVP: <https://www.facebook.com/events/646752962827665/>

The Wilbury Theatre Group offers classes, performances, and events live-streamed on the company's Facebook and YouTube pages. Presented with support from GoLocalProv. Audience members will be able to watch the performances live via The Wilbury Group Facebook page, YouTube, and on the GoLocalProv website at golocalprov.com. Video of livestreamed events will be held on The Wilbury Group's website for future viewings. View the current schedule of performances below. For more information about the performances or The Wilbury Group's livestreaming program, visiting thewilburygroup.org/streaming.

"Art of the Ocean State" Wickford Art Association exhibit running June 26 to July 19, 2020 with Virtual Gallery to launch June 30th. Everything that makes RI beautiful, unique, quirky, fun-sized and our home! Visit the Wickford Art Association for more information at: <https://wickfordart.org/art-of-the-ocean-state-4/>



Rhode Island State Council on the Arts
Art is the Anchor

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, BH Link is here for you

BH Link's mission is to ensure all Rhode Islanders experiencing mental health and substance use crises receive the appropriate services they need as quickly as possible in an environment that supports their recovery. Call 911 if there is risk of immediate danger. Visit the BH Link website at www.bhlink.org or for confidential support and to get connected to care:

CALL (401) 414-LINK (5465)

If under 18 CALL: (855) KID(543)-LINK(5465)

Visit the 24-HOUR/7-DAY TRIAGE CENTER at 975 Waterman Avenue, East Providence, RI

Stay Informed with Information on COVID-19

Rhode Island Department of Health COVID-19 Resources

Hotline (401) 222-8022 or 211 after hours;

Email RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov

Website <https://health.ri.gov/covid/>

Center for Disease Control COVID-19 Information

Website cdc.gov/coronavirus

Videos <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/videos.html>

Includes a link to ASL videos

BHDDH Information on COVID-19's Impact on DD Services and the DD Community

Website bhddh.ri.gov/COVID

RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN)

Website <https://ripin.org/covid-19-resources/>

Call Center (401) 270-0101 or email callcenter@ripin.org

Advocates in Action – for videos and easy to read materials

Website <https://www.advocatesinaction.org/>

Website offers BrowseAloud, which will read the website to you

Sign Up for Our Email List

If you aren't receiving email updates and newsletters from the Division, you can sign up on our website. From the main BHDDH page at bhddh.ri.gov, select **What's New**, then go to bottom and click on **DD Community Newsletter**. The link to sign up for the BHDDH Newsletter is directly below the title, as shown in the picture at right.

DD Community Newsletter

[SIGN UP FOR THE BHDDH NEWSLETTER](#)

Contacting the Division

The department is working on a reduced workforce and therefore calls should not be placed directly to your social caseworker. DDD has put 24-hour phone coverage in place with a central business hour phone number and an on-call number for nights and weekends.

If you have a vital need, please call the numbers below. If you have any general questions or concerns, please email them if you can, in order to try to leave the phone lines free for those who need to call. We will do our best to address your questions directly or through future newsletters.



Healthcare Facilities Visitation Policy

(Updated 5/8/2020)

Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), is recommending that all healthcare facilities consider implementing visitor restrictions. This recommendation is made in response to the increasing number of patients diagnosed with COVID-19 globally, the patients diagnosed in Rhode Island, and the ongoing influenza respiratory illness season.

In light of the US Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention's (CDC) guidance, and in concert with infection control professionals, RIDOH has implemented a three-phase approach to visitation restrictions. Each level becomes increasingly more restrictive. It is the hope that upon recommendation of the Director of Health, all healthcare agencies will operate at the same level of visitor restriction (see attached).

Other considerations when implementing your facility-specific visitor policy might include:

- Single point or controlled access to the healthcare facility
- Visitor identification

The Director of Health recognizes that this policy may cause a hardship for patients and their families. We ask for patience and understanding as we take steps that we believe will help minimize the spread of both the seasonal flu and COVID-19.

Special circumstances may warrant case-by-case exceptions to these recommendations in an effort to meet the needs of patients and their families, while maintaining the health and safety of healthcare workers and the general public. It is important to understand that patients younger than 18 years of age, are expected to need one support person present and appropriate accommodations should be considered.

When a support person is essential to the care of a patient with a disability, including patients who have altered mental status, communication barriers, or behavioral concerns (such as patients with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD), dementia, and/or behavioral health needs), accommodations for the patient should be made so that the patient can be accompanied by the support person. These accommodations can facilitate communication with hospital staff, accessibility, equal access to treatment and/or the provision of informed consent in accordance with the civil rights of patients with disabilities. A support person may include a family member, guardian, community support provider, peer support specialist, or personal care attendant. In some instances, there may be a need to permit the designation of two support people to ease the burden

on any one individual support person, while still permitting only one support person to be present at a time.

Patients with a disability shall similarly be allowed to use assistive technology (e.g., smart phones, tablets, and other communication devices, such as assistive technology and communication boards, to facilitate communication and ensure equal access.

Senior leadership should be involved in the decision-making for any exception requests. If members of senior leadership have non-clinical questions related to the exception request, they should call the Center for Facilities Regulation at 401-222-2566. For questions about the clinical elements of the exception, they should call RIDOH's Center for Acute Infectious Disease Epidemiology (CAIDE) at 401-222-2577 Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. -4:30 p.m. (after hours and on weekends: 401-276-8046).

These restrictions may change as more information becomes available during this evolving and dynamic COVID-19 response.

Effective Today, March 5, 2020: Visitor Restriction Recommendation is Level 1.

Visitor Restrictions are in Place in this Location

LEVEL 1 - Reducing visitation to protect vulnerable populations

Anyone who meets the conditions listed below are restricted from visiting staff or patients in the facility:

- Under the age of 18 years
- Feeling sick or having any of these symptoms: cough, elevated temperature >100.0, chills, runny nose, stuffy nose, sore throat, repeated shaking and chills, muscle pain, headache, new loss of taste or smell, diarrhea

----- LEVEL 2 - Limiting visiting hours

For healthy individuals, visiting hours are now limited to a single three-hour block in the morning and again in the evening.

Anyone who meets the conditions listed below remain restricted from visiting staff or patients in the facility:

- Individuals in the categories below are prohibited from visiting at all.
 - Under the age of 18 years
- Feeling sick or having any of these symptoms: Cough, elevated temperature >100.0, chills, runny nose, stuffy nose, sore throat, repeated shaking and chills, muscle pain, headache, new loss of taste or smell, diarrhea

LEVEL 3 – No visitation allowed other than those essential to care and who are free of the exclusion criteria in Levels 1 and 2.

Caution: Individuals with underlying serious health conditions, although not strictly prohibited from visiting, may want to utilize an alternative mechanism to connect with the intended patient.