



**Public Information Contact**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Rutherford County DSS Temporary Procedures During COVID-19 Crisis**

The COVID-19 crisis is unprecedented and presents many challenges for all of us. The Department of Social Services realizes that our services are essential for many of our citizens to ensure that their needs are met and to protect vulnerable children and adults. While we will continue to provide all services and are not closed to the public, we have put temporary procedures in place to protect both our consumers and our staff from potential exposure to COVID-19.

Food and Nutrition Services, as well as, Medical Assistance including Medicaid and NC Health Choice (CHIP) can be applied for through e-pass (<https://www.nc.gov/services/e-pass>). We strongly encourage anyone who wishes to apply for these services to use this site. If this is not possible or if you are not comfortable with applying in this manner, please call our office at 828-287-6165. Our phone system will direct you to the proper Department to speak with a caseworker about the services that you need, and they will work with you to make an application. Information regarding a Food and Nutrition account (EBT card), including the balance, can also be obtained by calling the EBT Call Center at 1-888-622-7328. For any information that needs to be delivered to your caseworker, a drop box has been placed at the entrance of Building C. Many forms and documents can be faxed and emailed, your caseworker can provide that information.

In both of our lobby areas, we are screening anyone that presents in person using a COVID-19 screening questionnaire to determine if they are potentially at risk, including presenting symptoms and travel. If someone is deemed to be at risk based on their answers, they will be asked to leave and conduct their business by telephone. Anyone that walks in to apply for any services, or to see a worker in any department, including Child Support, or to make an Adult or Child Protective Services report, will be asked by the worker to leave the building and connect by telephone. There is a telephone located in the lobby for anyone that does not have access to a telephone. Consumers will only be permitted past the lobby area when absolutely necessary and employees will wear gloves and a mask and practice recommended social distancing when making any face to face contact with a consumer.

Many employees at DSS are working remotely from home in order to reduce the number of people in our buildings, but this will have no negative impact on our ability to communicate with our consumers. As is our current policy, any voicemail messages will be returned within 24 hours. To protect the privacy of our employees working from home, consumers should expect some returned calls to be from a "Withheld" number or "No Caller ID". During the COVID-19 crisis, we are experiencing higher call volumes so it may take longer for calls to be answered.

When Child and Adult Services workers make home visits, for their own protection and the protection of the family, they will ask if anyone in the home is currently sick or been sick within the last 14 days. If the

answer to this question is yes, the worker will take reasonable precautions including putting on a face mask and gloves and maintain six feet or more from all present, when possible.

The protection and safety of our community, the consumers that we serve, and our employees is our top priority, and we ask for the public's patience as we strictly follow these temporary procedures. Again, we strongly encourage everyone to call the office and attempt to conduct business by phone rather than coming in person, and stay at home when at all possible. It takes everyone following all guidance and adhering to restrictions from our Federal, State, and County officials to get this crisis behind us.

We are committed to providing relevant and timely communication and updates during these uncertain times. Information is ever changing and updates and program policy changes can be found by checking our Facebook page (Rutherford County Department of Social Services) or by contacting our office at 828-287-6165. Child Support consumers also can access case information by calling the Customer Service line at (800)-992-9457 or by visiting [www.ncchildsupport.com](http://www.ncchildsupport.com).