



## **MEPD and Texas Works Bulletin 20-04**

**Date:** March 23, 2020

**To:** Eligibility Services Supervisors and Staff  
Program Managers  
Eligibility Services Supervisors  
Regional Attorneys  
Hearings Officers

**From:** Access and Eligibility Services Program Policy  
State Office 2115

**Subject: COVID-19 Policy Updates #1**

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The information in this bulletin provides temporary guidance regarding policies and procedures for processing case actions during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Staff will be notified when the COVID-19 policy and clarifications should no longer be used for processing case actions and determining eligibility. If you have any questions regarding the policy information in this bulletin, follow regional procedures.

Active bulletins are posted on the following websites:

- [Texas Works Handbook \(TWH\)](http://hhs.texas.gov/laws-regulations/handbooks/texas-works-handbook/texas-works-bulletins) at <http://hhs.texas.gov/laws-regulations/handbooks/texas-works-handbook/texas-works-bulletins>;
- [Medicaid for the Elderly and People with Disabilities Handbook \(MEPDH\)](https://hhs.texas.gov/laws-regulations/handbooks/mepd/policy-bulletins) at <https://hhs.texas.gov/laws-regulations/handbooks/mepd/policy-bulletins>.

## COVID-19 Policy Updates #1

### Background

On March 13, 2020, Governor Greg Abbott declared a state of disaster for all counties in Texas due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. On the same date, President Donald J. Trump declared a national emergency. Guidance from state and federal leaders emphasize the need for social distancing and limiting contact with others during this time. In light of this guidance, HHSC is providing the following policy clarifications and temporary changes to eligibility policies to accommodate processing of case actions during this emergency period.

#### 1. Texas Health Steps Requirements

[Texas Works Medicaid \(TP44 and TP48\)](#)

### Current Policy

Children certified for Medicaid between the ages of 2 and 18 are required to comply with the regimen of care prescribed by Texas Health Steps. Eligibility staff check for compliance at redetermination after the caretaker has been informed of the requirements.

If the child has a Texas Health Steps overdue date, eligibility staff contact the caretaker to allow self-declaration that the child:

- had the screening;
- is scheduled for the screening; or
- has not been screened but has good cause (TWH Section A-1531.5, Compliance Requirements).

Good cause exists when circumstances beyond the person's control prevent them from complying with the requirement.

### COVID-19 Policy

If the child has not been screened for Texas Health Steps, staff should explore good cause due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staff should continue to follow existing verification and good cause policies for compliance with Texas Health Steps requirements on a case by case basis.

Examples of good cause reasons due to the COVID-19 pandemic may include, but are not limited to, if the person:

- is unable to schedule an appointment due to appointment unavailability including if the health care provider is not currently performing Texas Health Steps checkups or the health care provider is closed;
- is unable to schedule a visit due to self-quarantine; or

- states that getting the screening would put the child at risk because of potential exposure to COVID-19.

Staff should follow policy in TWH Section A-2124.5, Good Cause for Texas Health Steps Noncooperation, to capture the good cause reason in TIERS Data Collection and document in case comments that the household was unable to meet Texas Health Steps requirements due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Automation**

Automation changes are not required.

### **Correspondence**

Correspondence changes are not required.

### **Handbook**

Handbook updates are not required.

### **Training**

Training is not required.

### **Effective Date**

This policy is effective with the release of this bulletin. Staff will be notified when the COVID-19 policy and clarifications no longer apply.

## 2. Interview Requirements

### TP08 and TANF

### **Current Policy**

An interview is required at initial application and redetermination (TWH Section A-130, Interview Procedures).

### **COVID-19 Policy**

An interview is no longer required at initial application or redetermination. Additionally, staff must not schedule an interview for TP 08 (Parent and Caretaker Relatives Medicaid) and TANF.

Staff must select **YES** for "*Was interview conducted?*" and enter an interview date in the **Individual Interviewed - Details** page on the **Individual Interviewed - Summary** LUW in TIERS. Staff must also document in case comments that an interview was not conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview date entered should be the date staff are processing the application or recertification.

**Automation**

Automation changes are not required.

**Correspondence**

Correspondence changes are not required.

**Handbook**

Handbook updates are not required.

**Training**

Training is not required.

**Effective Date**

This policy is effective with the release of this bulletin. Staff will be notified when the COVID-19 policy and clarifications no longer apply.

*3. Personal Responsibility Agreement (PRA) Requirements*  
TANF

**Current Policy**

Caretakers or second parents, including minor parents certified as adults, are required to meet the following requirements in order to remain eligible (TWH A-2110 General Policy):

- Participate in the Choices Program;
- Cooperate with child support requirements;
- Not voluntarily quit their job;
- Children must be screened through the Texas Health Steps Program;
- Children must be up to date with their immunizations;
- Children must meet school attendance requirements;
- Eligible adults must attend parenting skills training; and
- Not abuse drugs or alcohol.

While certain households may be exempt from meeting some of these requirements, failure to meet these eligibility requirements without an exemption or good cause will result in a full family sanction. (TWH A-2140 Full-Family Sanction; TWH A-2144 Imposing a Penalty)

**COVID-19 Policy**

Allow good cause if the household is unable to meet any of the following requirements due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Participation in the Choices Program (TWH A-1860 Determining Good Cause);
- Voluntarily quitting their job (TWH A-2123.4 Good Cause for Voluntary Quit Noncooperation);
- Meeting the Texas Health Steps requirements (TWH A-2124.5 Good Cause for Texas Health Steps Noncooperation);
- Immunizations (TWH A-2125.4 Good Cause for Immunizations Noncooperation);
- Meeting the school attendance requirement (TWH A-1621 Exemptions from School Attendance Requirements); and
- Attending parenting skills training (TWH A-2127.5 Good Cause for Parenting Skills Noncooperation).

Follow existing verification and good cause policies for compliance with TANF PRA requirements as applicable on a case by case basis. Various reasons due to COVID-19 impacts will qualify as good cause for not being able to comply with the TANF PRA requirements, even if that reason is not specifically listed in policy.

Examples of good cause reasons can include but are not limited to the person:

- is unable to schedule an immunization appointment due to appointment unavailability or closure of the health care provider;
- is unable to verify their child's school attendance because the school is closed due to COVID-19;
- voluntarily quit a job to self-quarantine; or
- is unable to participate in Choices because services are limited.

Staff must document in case comments the circumstances that prevented compliance and that the household was unable to meet PRA requirements due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Automation**

Automation changes are not required.

### **Correspondence**

Correspondence changes are not required.

### **Handbook**

Handbook updates are not required.

### **Training**

Training is not required.

### **Effective Date**

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4. Verification of Income

All Programs

**Current Policy**

All countable income must be verified at initial application, redetermination and when a household reports a change. (TWH A-1370 Verification Requirements; MEDPH Appendix XVI Documentation and Verification Guide)

**COVID-19 Policy Clarification**

Accept an applicant's statement as verification of income when all attempts to verify the income have been unsuccessful because the person or the organization providing the income is not able to cooperate because of impacts related to COVID-19. Determine the budget amount based on the best available information.

Document all efforts to obtain verification and the circumstances in which an applicant's statement must be accepted as verification. (TWH A-137 Prudent Person Principle; TWH A-1370 Verification Requirements; TWH C- 932 Advisor Responsibility for Verifying Information and MEDPH Appendix XVI Documentation and Verification Guide)

**Automation**

Automation changes are not required.

**Correspondence**

Correspondence changes are not required.

**Handbook**

Handbook updates are not required.

**Training**

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5. Lone Star Card Replacements

SNAP and TANF

**COVID-19 Policy Clarification**

HHSC local offices will not be issuing replacement cards during the COVID-19 pandemic. If a household needs a replacement Lone Star Card but has recently moved, the household must call the Lone Star Help Desk to request a replacement be mailed to their new address. The Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) vendor will mail replacement Lone Star cards to new addresses of households that have moved before the address update is completed in TIERS. The EBT vendor will follow existing processes to direct households to make permanent address changes through 2-1-1 or [www.yourtexasbenefits.com](http://www.yourtexasbenefits.com).

**Automation**

Automation changes are not required.

**Correspondence**

Correspondence changes are not required.

**Handbook**

Handbook updates are not required.

**Training**

Training is not required.

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*6. Processing Case Actions for Medical Programs*  
[Medical Programs](#)

**COVID-19 Policy Clarification**

Do not dispose any case actions that result in denial for active Medicaid or CHIP EDGs. These EDGs should be left as pending. Staff should set cases to *Suspend – Other* in EWMS if a Medicaid or CHIP EDG is set to deny. More information about how to process these EDGs will be provided at a later date.

Continue to dispose all case actions for new Medicaid applications that result in a denial.

**Automation**

Automation changes are not required.

**Correspondence**

Correspondence changes are not required.

**Handbook**

Handbook updates are not required.

**Training**

Training is not required.

**Effective Date**

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