



Community Connection Newsletter

resources for the community

March 26, 2020



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COVID-19 PREPARATIONS TO THE PATHLIGHT COMMUNITY

We understand that the news about COVID-19 is challenging and ever-changing. Trying to decipher what is best for you, your family and the individuals and families we support can be hard and anxiety producing. We are working very closely with each other, other providers, our trade organizations and state funders to navigate and come up with action plans. This unprecedented situation is more than one person, family or provider can solve. As we work together, we have the best chance of limiting the spread and impact of this virus.

Here at Pathlight (including Autism Connections, Whole Children, Milestones and Family Empowerment) we have been responding to the COVID-19 pandemic for several weeks and we continue to actively assess the situation and respond according to the current and anticipated situation. The Pathlight Executive Leadership Team is meeting daily to evaluate credible information, work with our funders, and implement strategies to support the Pathlight community. Below is a current report on our situation. We will update this as needed.

Programs and Offices

In an effort to protect the individuals we serve and the staff who care for them, we are practicing social distancing by minimizing the number of people in our worksites and our in-person interactions with co-workers. We are working to arrange for as many staff as possible to work remotely.

All of our sites (offices and residences) are closed to visitors and our offices will have minimal staff and services available. By doing this, we limit the number of potential contacts between people and therefore the opportunities for spread. This also allows the leadership team to focus our efforts on doing everything we can to support and protect the essential staff that we count on to come into work and provide critical services for the people we serve.

At this time our offices are not closed. Critical functions such as health and safety trainings and rep payee processing functions will continue. We will continue to be here for staff, care providers and families via phone and email.

Residential

All Residential homes will be checking temperatures of staff when they report to work and sending people home if their temperature is 100.3 per current CDC recommendation. We are restricting visitors to our homes and are setting up webcams in homes to help families stay in touch.

Family Services

Family Services are curtailing physical home visits unless approved by management for a specific situation. They will be calling and video conferencing with families, care providers and individuals on a regular basis.

Whole Children/ Milestones enrichment classes

Classes are currently on a scheduled break. We have delayed the start of the new session for two weeks, and are currently scheduled to start back up on April 13 if all is well.

Milestones Day Program, Inclusive Community Center

The Milestone Community Based Day program is closed March 17 through April 7, unless we are given different directives.

Contact us if you need help, and be safe!

Please note that all information is subject to change as the situation and supports or activities evolve. If you have questions or need help, please call 413-779-5087, email a specialist listed on page 7, or email us at autismconnections@pathlightgroup.org.

AUTISM CONNECTIONS AND FAMILY EMPOWERMENT EVENTS

Autism Conference

Autism Connections and Pathlight are committed to proactively preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus and to protecting the health and safety of all of the families that we serve, our team, and the greater community.

It was with great regret that we cancelled the Autism Conference scheduled for April 2 at the Springfield Sheraton Monarch Place Hotel in Springfield.

We will refund all paid transactions as soon as possible and we look forward to seeing you next year. We are sorry that for the first time in 30 years we will not be able to come together as a community to share information and inspiration, but Autism Connections is here to support families and individuals as always.

Thank you for your understanding and for your continued interest in the Autism Conference and Autism Awareness.

Family Empowerment Workshops

Workshops will continue as virtual events whenever possible. Please check the Family Empowerment Facebook page for information.

The Special Needs Family Alliance in Greenfield group meeting on April 1 will be held on Zoom. See the group's [event page](#) on the Family Empowerment Facebook page for the link to join the virtual event on April 2 and April 16.

Our Coffee and Conversation series will continue online starting Sunday, March 29, from 9:30-11:00 a.m. This is a conversation group for all. The other groups next week are Tuesday March 31, 9:30-11:00 a.m, Tuesday March 31, 8:30-10:00p.m., Thursday April 2, 9:30-11:00 a.m, and Thursday April 2, 8:30-10:00p.m. Check the [Family Empowerment Facebook page](#) for the link to join the meeting and for a more complete description of the group. Thank you for your patience as we set up the meetings electronically.

Autism Connections' events

Events will continue virtually when possible. Stay tuned for more information.

Whole Children and Milestones Recreation classes

Classes are currently on a scheduled break. We have delayed the start of the new session for two weeks, and are currently scheduled to start back up on April 13.

STATE, FEDERAL AND NATIONAL RESOURCES

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#): check this site for all updated COVID-19 information.

[Essential services during Stay at Home Order](#): check this information to see which organizations deemed essential in Massachusetts are allowed to continue services.

[MA Department of Public Health](#)

[Mass.gov](#): updated general state information relative to COVID-19.

<https://www.mass.gov/lists/coronavirus-resources-for-dds-families-and-individuals>

[Information about Covid-19 in plain language for individuals with disabilities](#)

[Call 211](#): Non-emergency state information service

[World Health Organization](#)

State, Special Education Related

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/covid19.html>

[Coronavirus/Covid-19 Frequently Asked Questions For Schools And Districts Regarding Special Education - March 17, 2020](#)

Federal, Special Education Related

[Questions And Answers On Providing Services To Children With Disabilities During The Coronavirus Disease Outbreak- Issued March 2020](#)

[Supplemental Fact Sheet — Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary](#)



[Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities, March 21, 2020](#)

Small Businesses

The Baker-Polito Administration announced on March 18, 2020, that the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) will offer low-interest federal disaster loans for working capital to Massachusetts small businesses suffering substantial economic injury as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

The disaster declaration makes SBA assistance available following a request from Governor Charlie Baker on March 17, 2020.

Small Business Assistance for COVID-19

Job Loss/Unemployment

We know losing your job is stressful. If you're out of work and able and available to work, you may be eligible for unemployment insurance (UI). If you qualify, you will receive weekly payments while you search for a new job. The amount you receive is based on what you earned in the last year.

Assistance (DUA) manages the UI program for Massachusetts. The MassHire Department of Career Services provides free resources to help you get back to work. [Apply for Unemployment Benefits](#), or call (617) 626-6338 to request weekly benefits, daily 6 a.m.–10 p.m.

[Virtual town halls to help explain how to file for benefits.](#)

HEALTH SERVICES

Masshealth Information (call MassHealth at (800) 841-2900)

PCA services: For those receiving PCA services and who cannot currently fill the hours, they can receive Home Health Aides to cover the amount of PCA hours they receive. If PCA hours are being used in part, Home Health Aides will fill the remaining hours. This will last during the entirety that MA is under a state of emergency. Click this [link](#) for all the details including how to access this service.

MassHealth Prescription services: MassHealth is allowing early refills and 90 day supplies. Contact

your pharmacist to order medications. View more information [HERE](#).

Telehealth services: Telehealth services are covered by MassHealth. Discuss with your provider for more information.

[MassHealth Telehealth Services for Behavioral Health](#)

[Governor Baker's Expansion of Telehealth Services Order](#)

[MassHealth Telehealth Services for Behavioral Health](#)

[Governor Baker's Expansion of Telehealth Services Order](#)

[MassHealth member questions and answers related to COVID-19](#)

Mental Health Resources

Maintaining Emotional Health & Well-Being During the COVID-19 Outbreak

Taking care of your emotional health and well-being during this time is important. Decreasing stress can help bolster your immune system and can help keep you and others around you healthy. Click [HERE](#) for a list of resources and tips from Mass.gov for staying emotionally healthy and well.

FOOD PANTRIES

Find a food bank or food distribution site near you [HERE](#), or contacting the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts at 413-247-9738.

[Berkshire County programs and schedule](#)

[Franklin County programs and schedule](#)

[Hampden County programs and schedule](#)

[Holyoke](#)

[Springfield](#)

[Hampshire County programs and schedule](#)

SHOPPING: SPECIAL ELDER HOURS

Stop & Shop - 6:00 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. daily

Geissler's in Agawam: 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m.



Autism Connections, Family Empowerment, Whole Children, Milestones, Whole Selves, Adult Family Care, Shared Living

Big Y: 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m.

Whole Foods: one hour before standard opening hours

Trader Joe's: expedited special senior line to enter the store from 9:00 a.m - 10:00 a.m.

Walgreen's: 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.: Tuesdays

Walmart: 6:00* a.m. - 7:00 a.m.: Tuesdays *or one hour before standard store opening

Costco: 8:00 a.m - 9:00 a.m.: Tuesdays/Thursdays

Target: Reserved shopping the first hour on Wednesdays

DELIVERY SERVICES

General information

Simos Produce: Pre-packed grocery box items, 2 box minimum delivery.

Instacart: groceries, especially in the Berkshires.

SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS

Western Mass listing of school lunch programs

SCHOOL RELATED SERVICES

State Education Related

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/covid19.html>

Coronavirus/Covid-19 Frequently Asked Questions For Schools And Districts Regarding Special Education - March 17, 2020

Providing special education services during this time (Federal resources)

Questions And Answers On Providing Services To Children With Disabilities During The Coronavirus Disease Outbreak- Issued March 2020

Supplemental Fact Sheet — Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities, March 21, 2020

Educators/PT/Speech/OT/Behavior Specialists/Nurses/Consultants who want to help you and

are willing to offer consultations online. Get more information and fill out the form [HERE](#).

SUPPORT FOR THE HOMELESS

From the Mass Coalition for the Homeless:

*Access to shelter: With office closures until at least April 3rd, families with children seeking to apply for Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter only can apply by phone with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Please share this number with families seeking shelter: **1-866-584-0653**. More details about the EA program can be found here: [Get Help: Families with Children](#)*

ONLINE GROUPS/LIVESTREAM

Check out the [Federation for Children with Special Needs facebook page](#) for their weekday Livestream events for information and support. More information: (617) 236-7210.

MassPAC Monday, Transition Tuesday, Wellness, Wednesday, Thriving Thursday, Facts Friday

Western MA Recovering Learning Community

The Western Mass Recovery Learning Community (RLC) supports healing and empowerment for our broader communities and people who have been impacted by psychiatric diagnosis, trauma, extreme states, homelessness, problems with substances, and other life-interrupting challenges. See their new, temporary listing on online support groups [HERE](#). Call (866) 641-2853 for more information.

AANE (Asperger/autism network)

Check out upcoming online events [here](#). Call 617-393-3824 x32 for more information. Please include your name, phone number, city you live in, and (if possible) your email address.

Special Needs Family Alliance

The Special Needs Family Alliance in Greenfield group meeting on April 1 will be held on Zoom. See the group's [event page](#) on the Family Empowerment Facebook page for the link to join the virtual event on April 1 and April 16.



TRANSPORTATION

Most transportation at this time is only being used for essential workers and emergencies since it is a safety issue and difficult to practice social distancing. Options to find a ride: <https://www.mass.gov/im-looking-for-transportation>

PVTA Service Update: Starting Monday, March 23, 2020, PVTA will begin operating on a Modified Saturday Schedule in the Springfield and Northampton Service Areas. Service will follow a Saturday Schedule, Monday – Saturday with modified service hours of 6:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. Routes that usually operate Monday – Friday only, may have service during the week with modified hours of 6:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. Sundays will continue to operate on a Sunday Service Schedule. Please click Service Adjustments for the UMass Service Area schedule changes and detailed route information for entire system. Van service will follow the Modified Saturday Schedule. Call 413-781-7882 for more information.

CHILDCARE

[Emergency childcare locations](#)

[Click this link for information on how the emergency childcare program will work](#) Priority will be given to health care workers, essential state workers, COVID-19 health workers, grocery store employees, emergency response personnel, law enforcement, transportation and infrastructure workers, sanitation workers, DCF involved families and families living in shelters.

WEBINARS

[Supporting Children on the Autism Spectrum in Schools](#) from FCSN, April 21, 12:30.

[Visions of Community Conference workshops to review](#) (past event)

[Understanding the Census](#)

Webinar with the Arc of Massachusetts, April 1st, 2020, 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm. Join Ellen Taverna, Policy Officer at The Arc of Massachusetts, and The Arc's 2020 Census team for a run through of the 2020 Census Day, what it is, why it matters to people with disabilities, a run through of a mock census form, and more. Register [HERE](#).

[Social and Emotional Learning Alliance for Massachusetts](#)

The Autism Society: On Wednesday, March 25th at 7pm EST, the Facebook Live series continues with myHana, featuring Dr. Jed Baker to discuss “Maintaining Hope and Handling Frustration and Anxiety.” Click on the home page for more information.

HEAT AND ELECTRIC SERVICES

National Grid has put out the following statement for electrical customers: *“We recognize that certain customers may experience financial difficulty as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, whether they or a family member fall ill, are required to quarantine, or because their income is otherwise affected. We hope to alleviate our affected customers’ concerns about their electricity and natural gas service during this time.*

As a result, National Grid is temporarily suspending collections-related activities, including service disconnections, to lessen any financial hardship the COVID-19 pandemic may have on our customers. These policies are effective immediately and will be in place through the end of April. We will evaluate their continued need at that time. Please note that regular billing will continue for all customers.”

Eversource Eversource Statement: *“We’ve suspended disconnections, late fees and are offering a special, flexible payment plan — with no down payment — for any past-due amount to help customers in response to COVID-19.”* Learn more [HERE](#).

[Las respuestas a las preguntas frecuentes están disponibles en español.](#)

Fuel assistance is “completing intakes over the phone. We encourage everyone to call and complete their appointment over the phone. Please consider the safety of our staff before coming into the office, please call 413-552-1548 (press 1 for English, 2 for Spanish and then 4 to speak with a live person). The office is open from 8:30-4:30 M-F”.

INTERNET SERVICES

Comcast

Comcast has taken immediate steps to help connect



low-income families to the Internet at home. New Internet Essentials customers will receive two free months of Internet service, which is available to all qualified low-income households for \$9.95/month plus tax. **Apply** by April 30, 2020. Call 1-855-846-8376 for information.

Charter/Spectrum

Charter will offer free Spectrum broadband and Wi-Fi access for 60 days to households with K-12 and/or college students who do not already have a Spectrum broadband subscription and at any service level up to 100 Mbps. Installation fees will be waived for new student households. To enroll call 1-844-488-8395 or click **[HERE](#)**.

HOW TO MANAGE TIME AT HOME

A Spectrum of Ideas for Autism at Home (Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism): The First 8 Steps for Tackling This Quarantine for Families Affected by Autism

Supporting Individuals with Autism through Uncertain Times, from the *UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute Autism Team*, [full package of information including social stories, schedules and all downloadable support sheets](#)

The 7 support strategies are designed to meet the unique needs of individuals with autism during this period of uncertainty. In addition, examples and ready-made resources are included to help caregivers implement these strategies quickly and easily. These materials purposely represent a variety of styles/designs/complexity to model the range of what may be most meaningful across ages and skills, and to demonstrate what can be generated with few materials by busy caregivers. Specific adaptations and additions may be necessary to best meet the varied needs of individual children and young adults.

These strategies are intended to be a menu or toolkit of ideas that may be helpful-- caregivers may take one idea at a time and find a way to make it work for their child(ren) with autism and their family. Caregivers may want to start with a strategy they have used in the past, or perhaps find a tool to address the issue that is creating the most immediate stress. Consider involving the individual with autism in the decision-

making process about what tools would be most helpful.

RESOURCES IN OTHER LANGUAGES

[FAMILIAS: Buscando Ayuda para Nuestros Niños con Planes de Educación Individualizados/Necesidades de Apoyo](#)

[Información de COVID-19 Por y Para Personas con Discapacidades](#)

[Stop the spread of germs and social distancing fact sheets in multiple languages](#)

SOCIAL STORIES

[Flip Book](#), <https://littlepuddins.ie/coronavirus-social-story/>, [My Story about Pandemics and Coronavirus](#) by Carol Grey, [Easter Seals](#)

FUN ONLINE ACTIVITIES!

Virtual Farm tours from the American Dairy Association.

Audible Books for free

Amazing Education is a website full of virtual tours, home school ideas and general activities. Visit the list of resources [here](#).

Virtual Field Trips: a collection of 30 virtual tours of museums, aquariums, zoos and other sites.

AANE Online Bad Movie Watch Party: If you are an adult with an Asperger profile and you're developing a case of cabin fever, join AANE for an evening of "so bad it's good" cinema, featuring *Plan 9 from Outer Space!* March 26, 6:30-8:30. Registration required, zoom link will be sent upon registration. [Register](#)

Connecticut Science Center (Facebook page link)

Metropolitan Opera

Have you always wanted to go to the opera? Well, put on those headphones (or not) and listen to nightly livestreams of amazing performances on the [Opera's facebook page](#).



Our team is using a variety of technology to stay connected to you - email is our first choice. If we return your phone call our calls may show as restricted in some cases, so please check your messages if you are expecting to hear from us.

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

How can we help you?

If you are already connected to Family Empowerment or Autism Connections, we will be reaching out to you individually if we have not already contacted you about communication during this time.

If you would like more information about family support services at Family Empowerment, or Autism Connections, please contact us at familyempowerment@pathlightgroup.org, autismconnections@pathlightgroup.org or at any of the other programs through Pathlight. Stay strong, and healthy.

Life can be tough,
 but so are you,
and we can help.

If you would like to help us meet emergency needs during this very difficult and uncertain time, contact us at autismconnections@pathlightgroup.org or visit our [giving page](#).