
A good practice approach to medicals during Covid-19



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It is essential that foster carers have good physical, mental and emotional health to be able to meet the needs of children in their care. This could include the physical fitness to lift and carry younger children, or children with additional needs, and the emotional resilience to manage the challenges children who have experienced chaotic lifestyles might bring.

As part of a fostering assessment, a medical report must be produced to evidence and inform of any health issues, and to consider whether health needs identified could impact on their ability to foster. Regulation 26 (1A) and Schedule 3, Part 1 para 2 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 require details of the prospective foster carers health, supported by a medical report from a suitably qualified professional.

Over the years, widely accepted best practice has been for an applicant's GP to complete a full medical, usually based on the Coram BAAF AH2 form. This comprehensive assessment considers the applicants medical history, a medical examination and access to medical records which include individual and family history. Further questions relate to lifestyle factors that might impact on their ability to parent vulnerable children.

On completion, the GP medical will be returned to the fostering agency, which is then sent to the fostering agency's medical advisor, who will produce the medical report for the assessment taking into consideration the GP assessment and will consider any direct questions posed by the fostering agency.

However, during the COVID crisis, GP capacity to undertake medicals has varied even within local areas. Potentially, this can mean a backlog in carers awaiting approval or review at panel, and so could impact on sufficiency and choice for children.

It is good practice to request a full GP medical in the first instance, but most agencies have had to adapt and be creative to ensure they are able to progress with the assessment of those applying to foster. Most IFAs have used a medical self-declaration form, which once completed by the applicant(s) has been sent to the agency medical advisor to produce the medical report.

As restrictions ease, we may find that each agency needs to decide on which approach (or a blend of approaches) to take, and sometimes this will be different for each applicant they process depending on the applicant's GP and their capacity to cooperate in this process. It is important that whichever path an agency takes, they can fully justify the decision they make, and evidence the impact.

The process below is intended to support IFAs to follow a robust approach to obtaining the medical information required to progress with the fostering application in a manner that will represent best practice in current circumstances and be compliant with both regulation and inspection.

Full GP Medical Application
to be carried out by the agency

If successful, on return, proceed to
medical advisor

If unsuccessful, proceed with this process
A self-declaration form is sent to applicants
with a covering disclaimer letter:
See appendix A

Self-declaration form sent to the agency Medical Advisor:

*The agency should evidence any relevant questions they want
considering by the Medical Advisor to inform the fostering
assessment*

Medical Advisor sends request to GP to clarify if they have
any safeguarding concerns in relation to the applicants
fostering vulnerable children (the Medical Advisor will
comment whether there has been a response from the GP
with regards to safeguarding):

See appendix B

*Creativity - is the GP willing to supply a copy of any
relevant extract from the medical
records (Medical Advisor to pose this question)*

Applicants could obtain a basic health check from
a private chemist. Information to
be shared with Medical Advisor who could contact
the GP surgery to see if they have
any additional/contradicting information

Medical Advisor returns report to agency based on the self-declaration, questions posed by the agency, outcome from GP in relation to safeguarding (should this have been returned), basic health info from pharmacy (if using):

The agency uses the information to inform their fostering assessment (analysis in relation to how any medical needs may impact/or not on fostering, e.g. lifestyle)

The above information is considered within the panel process:
Agency to amend recruitment policy to reflect the current limitations/ensuring a review process.

The agency ensures the fostering panel is aware of the amendments to policy

Agency to have a robust process for revisiting the full medical via the GP – clear timescales, when restrictions lifted/early review or prior to first annual review (presented at fostering panel), whichever is soonest:

Any health needs not declared that may impact on carer ability to care for children could lead to questioning continued suitability – (Appendix A)

Where children are being placed prior to medical report from GP the carer disclaimer should include that should any concerns arise it could result in placement end/or review of approval - supported by placing LA

Agency to ensure there is no drift in revisiting the above and will have a clear and effective monitoring process:

*Review dates should be clear in the agency policy/system/database.
Agency to have a designated person for monitoring.*

Appendix A

Dear xx

Due to current restrictions in relation to Covid-19 your GP has been unable to prioritise the request to complete a full medical report. Until this situation can be resolved and to enable us to progress with your fostering application, we require you to complete the attached self-declaration form and return it to us without delay so that we can forward it to our qualified Medical Advisor.

It is expected that you will disclose all medical information as detailed in the self-declaration medical form. Please note that openness and honesty is essential to ensure your fostering application can be considered fully. Should you fail to disclose anything in relation to your physical, mental or emotional health that is highlighted at a later date by your GP, or that becomes evident (if you are successful in your fostering application) this could result in your ability to continue with your role.

The agency will revisit the full medical request via your GP once the current crisis allows, and the findings will return to the Medical Advisor and Fostering Panel for approval (cross referencing your self-assessment form).

Please sign the declaration:

I / we (names) understand that we must disclose any medical information. This information will be dealt with sensitively and will inform our fostering assessment.

I/ we understand that if anything is disclosed when the full medical assessment is revisited by the GP and the Medical Advisor that I / we have not disclosed may result in our ability to continue to foster.

I / we also understand that should any health needs impact on the care I / we can offer children, a specific medical assessment will again be requested, and may result in our ability to foster.

I / we (names) have not with-held any information in relation to our health that could impact on our ability to foster

Sign date

Sign date

Appendix B

Dear xx

I am contacting you in relation to xxxx who has applied to become a Foster Carer for
xxxxxxx

I am the Medical Advisor for the agency
(details of qualification and role)

I appreciate that under the current Covid-19 crisis you are unable to prioritise completing a full medical report for the applicants, however it is essential that the agency is fully informed of any concerns any professional may have in relation to safeguarding children.

Please could you send me a brief reply to highlight if you have any concerns in relation to xxxxx fostering children . I am sure you appreciate that the children that come into the care system are the most vulnerable in our society and it is essential that the welfare of the child is paramount.

I look forward to your response within the next 7 days , by contacting me direct (details). This will enable me to progress with the applicants' self-declaration medical form and support the fostering agency to continue with their full fostering assessment. It is essential that this process continues despite the current restrictions due to the shortage we have of foster carers who are essential to protect and care for children who are unable to remain with their own families at this current time.

The agency has a robust process in place to ensure that foster carers can be recruited safely and they will revisit the full medical request at a time when this crisis is more manageable.

Thank you for your cooperation

Signed / dated



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