

FOSTER CARE HOME INSPECTIONS

PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE:

Individuals or families applying to become foster parents, or to adopt a child, must have their home(s) inspected as part of the requirements in order to gain approval from the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Home inspections assess whether the home meets health and safety standards prior to the issuance of a license or permit.

ROLE OF THE HEALTH OFFICER:

- May inspect the foster/adoptive family home using a standard form.
- Collaborate with foster care providers to understand and address any environmental health issues found on the inspection.
- Report any violations of the law to DCYF.
- Shall receive information on when the license is issued, as well as suspension or revocation of the license as per RSA 170-E:10:

LAWS AND REGULATION

According to NH statute 170 E, individuals may not provide "regular" care and supervision to children who are unrelated to the adult caregiver. These individuals must apply for and satisfactorily obtain a foster family care license. Persons seeking to adopt in NH, or who receive children whose adoption is not legally finalized, must also obtain a foster home license.

- [RSA 170-E](#): Child Day Care, Residential Care, and Child-Placing Agencies
- [He-C 6446](#) - FOSTER FAMILY CARE LICENSING REQUIREMENTS (i.e. Rules)

BACKGROUND OF FOSTER CARE:

Foster family care is a protective service for children and youth who must be removed from their parent or guardian due to abuse, neglect, delinquency or a "child in need of supervision" (CHINS) petition to the district court.

The licensing process is carried out by DCYF and private agencies licensed by DCYF. These private child-placing agencies are required to study and approve families according to Administrative Rules, 6446, Foster Family Care Licensing Requirements. Foster parents are licensed to care for unrelated children and must:

- Complete an inquiry and application packet
- Submit fingerprint-based Criminal Records and Central Registry Checks of child abusers for household members over 18 years of age
- A Department of Safety Registry of Criminal Offenders of all household members is completed.
- Provide medical clearance statements on all family members
- Submit the names of five references
- Provide local fire and health inspections of the home.

- Participate in at least two home visits with a social worker
- Successfully complete Foster & Adoptive Care Essentials (FACES) training
- Complete a home study with a DCYF Resource Worker or Agency Licensing Worker

The DCYF issues a license for no more than two years, and is renewable. The license is specific to the number, age and gender of children that may be served. Two parent households may serve no more than six children total, while a single parent may serve no more than four children.

The home health inspection is required only at initial licensure. The inspection forms for the health officer to complete are obtained from the applicant at time of the inspection. A sample can be found here: the [Foster and Adoptive Family Home Health Inspection Report](#)

THE FOSTER CARE INSPECTION FORM

The “Foster and Adoptive Family Home Health Inspection Report” is used to indicate that a foster or adoptive home being licensed complies with the life safety code for a single family or multi-unit residence prior to issuance of a license or permit. The report is completed by the local home health inspector (i.e. health officer or building inspector) after an inspection of the home. The health inspector retains the second copy and gives the third copy to the foster/adoptive applicants. The foster/adoptive applicants send the original copy to the local District Office or Child Placement Agency.

The health inspector checks each item with a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ answer. Any questions answered by a “no” response must be explained in the section for comments below. If the home meets or exceeds the requirements, the health inspector dates and signs the form and returns it to the District Office noted. If the home does not meet the requirements, the health inspector notifies the applicant and recommends changes or improvements needed.

The form has five (5) sections to complete, including:

I. DHHS District Information: Enter date you started this form, and address of the DHHS district office or agency that it will be sent to.

II. Applicant Information: Enter the applicant name, phone and address.

III. Health Requirements: Inspect all areas and enter data.

1. Is there adequate supply of drinking water?

Inspect kitchen, bathrooms and laundry area to see if there are both hot and cold running water. Test the hot water with a thermometer and record if it's between 110 and 130 degrees. If it's below or above this range, note the health concerns. Test the water to see if it's under adequate pressure. Inspect to see if the drains are working.

1a. Is there safe and clean supply of drinking water?

Interview the applicant to see if water is from a ‘private water supply’ (i.e. a well owned by the

applicant or landlord and not regulated by NH DES). If so, ask them to provide test results that show a ‘Standard Analysis’ for bacteria and other contaminants within the past three years. See a description of the standard analysis at the link below. Take a photo of the results. Inspect the results to see if they are above the standard for bacteria, arsenic or other hazards. If you’re not sure, contact NH DES to interpret the results. If the drinking water is from a DES-approved ‘public water supply’, there is no need to ask for water test results.

<https://www.des.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt341/files/documents/2020-01/dwgb-2-1.pdf>

2. Is there a functioning sewage disposal system?

Interview the applicant to see if they are on public sewer line, or on a private septic system. If a septic system, inspect the area to see if there is a septic failure with a leak of fluids or odor of septic. Take a photo of any septic concerns. Inspect the toilet and flush to see if it removes waste or backs up.

3. Is the home free of evidence of insects and rodents?

Inspect the living areas for any evidence of insects or rodents. Inspect the bedding area of the child to ensure no bed bugs, lice or fleas. Take a photo of any health concerns, if needed.

4. Are there sanitary and safe facilities for the storage, preparation, and serving and cleaning of food.

Inspect the kitchen for cleanliness, and refrigerator for adequate cooling temperature. Leave a thermometer in the fridge for at least 30 seconds and record temperature (e.g. The refrigerator should be at 40 °F or below, and the freezer at 0 °F or below.). Inspect for means of sanitation of utensils (e.g. sink, brush, soap, and drying rack) or a functional dish washer. Take a photo of any sanitation concerns.

5. Is the home free from child-accessible toxic materials?

Inspect the kitchen, bathroom and home for correct storage of all toxic materials in a child-safe manner. Inspect for as cleaners, medicines, household chemicals, and paints that are clearly labeled, stored in original containers, separate from food, and not accessible to young children. Take a photo of any health or safety concerns.

6. Is the home and yard free from child-accessible hazards or sources of injury?

Inspect the area for safety precautions including but are not limited to structurally-sound porch and stair railings, stove and heater guards, swimming pool fences, locks and covers on wells. Take a photo of any health or safety concerns. Foster Family homes do not need to meet the requirements of child care centers.

7. Is the home free of animal hazards?

Interview the applicant to see if there are home pets. Dogs must be licensed and have current rabies vaccination certificates. Inspect any animal areas to ensure they are clean and sanitary. There are no licensing requirements for cats. Take a photo of any health or safety concerns.

IV. Comments: Write down any reflections on the inspection process, and add in any other comments you feel would be relevant to health issues such as sanitation, environmental health or safety. This is a good place to write down any health problems or risks not documented in other parts of the form.

V. Acknowledgments, Approvals and Record-keeping:

- Mark the form with your signature, town, phone number, and date of inspection.
- Mark the form to indicate if you approve or not.
- Have the foster parent sign the form
- Remove a copy to give to the foster person/adoptive parent.
- Remove a copy for the health officer/town, and take a photo of the form.
- The applicant foster family will send one copy to DCYF

Inspection Tools: In order to complete the inspection, you will need to bring the following items.

- A printed copy of the form (as a backup) and pen
- A food-grade thermometer to test hot water and refrigeration temperatures
- A strong flashlight for dark places or behind/ under obstacles
- A pair of disposable gloves
- A camera to document conditions (via photos or videos), and capture images of any certificates, licenses, records or test results.

For more information contact:

Foster Care and Adoption Services
Division for Children, Youth & Families
NH Department of Health & Human Services
129 Pleasant Street
Concord, NH 03301
Telephone: (603) 271-4451
Email: FosterNH@dhhs.nh.gov

<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/programs-services/child-protection-juvenile-justice/foster-care>