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Family Law Attorney Jason V. Owens explores the factors effecting parenting time during the novel coronavirus outbreak.

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[This blog was [featured in the New York Times](#). Read more [here](#).]



It is a scenario that many parents are now facing. Following a divorce or separation, children commonly shuttle back-and-forth between each parent's household based on a court-ordered visitation or parenting time schedule. What happens if one parent, or a member of his or her household, becomes infected with the coronavirus? Should the non-infected parent prevent the child from having parenting time with the infected parent? What about more ambiguous cases, such as when a parent or household member merely lives in a community with an outbreak, or if the parent or household member was exposed to an infected person, but has shown no signs of infection yet? How certain must a threat of infection be to justify a parent deviating from court-ordered parenting time? Do parents

who are subject to shelter-in-place and stay-at-home orders need to comply with court-ordered parenting time?

The answers to these questions are often unclear. Failing to comply with court-ordered parenting time always poses a risk of [contempt](#) for parents, and weighing that risk against the potential life-and-death consequences of coronavirus exposure poses serious challenges for parents throughout the United States, as the virus continues its spread. In this blog, we consider the serious implications of the novel coronavirus outbreak on [child custody](#), visitation and parenting time for [divorced](#) and [unmarried parents](#) in the United States.

Impact of Shelter-in-Place Orders and Stay-at-Home Advisories on Visitation Orders (3/26/2020 Update)

As the coronavirus pandemic has unfolded, many city and states have implemented [shelter-in-place and stay-at-home orders](#) that directly impact the free movement of parents and children between households. However, with many [family courthouses closed](#) to ordinary business in vast regions of the country, citizens have struggled to understand how movement-restricting orders

impact court-ordered visitation. It is important for parents to understand that even the most restrictive shelter-in-place orders may include exceptions to allow parents to comply with court-ordered parenting time. For example, [San Mateo County says this](#) about the California shelter-in-place order:

[T]he Order allows for travel both to care for family members and comply with legal obligations. Accordingly, it allows for joint custody arrangements for the care of children.

The highly restrictive Illinois shelter-in-place order is even more specific in permitting visitation, where the [order specifically defines "essential travel" as including custody exchanges between parents](#):

All travel ... except Essential Travel ... is prohibited. Essential Travel includes ... [t]ravel required by law enforcement or court order, including to transport children pursuant to a custody agreement.

New York, a major epicenter for the virus in the United States, also introduced a [restrictive shelter-in-place order](#) that limits citizens' movements. Information on whether the New York order legally restricts parents from complying with court-ordered parenting time is (so far) hard to come by. Other, less restrictive orders have [entered in other states](#). As of the date of this update (3/26/2020), many states, including [Pennsylvania](#) and [Massachusetts](#), have entered orders closing "non essential businesses", while "advising" (but not ordering) citizens to stay home. These less restrictive measures are clearly distinguishable from stricter shelter-in-place orders that legally prohibit citizens from leaving their homes except for "essential travel" or emergencies". Orders that close businesses, but do not specifically prevent citizens from leaving their homes, are less likely to impact parenting time.

It is critically important for parents to understand that cities, towns and counties may enter more restrictive shelter-in-place orders than a statewide order. For example, as of the date of this update (3/26/2020), [ten counties in Pennsylvania](#) are subject to more restrictive "stay at home orders" than the current statewide order, which merely closes non-essential businesses and encourages social distancing. Although these stricter county-level order in Pennsylvania still appear to allow "travel required by law enforcement or court order" and/or "travel to care for elderly, minors, [and] dependents", it is not entirely clear how the order impacts visitation on a county by county basis. Regardless, the multiple layers of orders in Pennsylvania illustrate the challenge faced by parents who are trying to understand whether travel restrictions impact their parenting plan.

In many states, it appears that efforts are being made to carve out exceptions to strict shelter-in-place orders to allow citizens to travel "in compliance with court orders", which may be interpreted as enabling court-ordered visitation. However, the degree to which jurisdictions are spelling out such exceptions vary widely between states and counties. Moreover, as discussed more fully below, family court officials on the county level may be offering their own guidance on visitation during the crisis. Finally, as the pandemic worsens in some areas, parents should be aware that cities, towns, counties and states can announce more restrictive measures at any time.

Massachusetts Chief Justice Offers Co-Parenting Guidance During Coronavirus Crisis (3/23/2020 Update)

On March 23, 2020, Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Probate & Family Court, Hon. John D. Casey, published an [open letter to parents](#) in Massachusetts regarding co-parenting during the coronavirus crisis. The [letter](#) reads in part:

It is times like this, when society faces threats once thought unimaginable, that the rule of law is more important than ever. Because of the great dedication and sacrifices of our staff, we remain available to enter orders and enforce existing orders in emergency situations. If you have exceptional/exigent circumstances, you should contact your local court.

Parenting orders are not stayed during this period of time. In fact, it is important that children spend time with both of their parents and that each parent have the opportunity to engage in family activities, where provided for by court order. In cases where a parent must self-quarantine or is otherwise restricted from having contact with others, both parents should cooperate to allow for parenting time by video conference or telephone.

In addition, the Chief Justice directed parents to the [Association of Family and Conciliation Courts website](#) for guidance on co-parenting during the crisis. Several elements of Judge Casey's letter are notable. First, he makes clear that the "stay-at-home advisory" in effect in Massachusetts at the time of his letter does not provide a legal basis for parents to simply refuse to comply with court-ordered visitation. At the same time, the letter implicitly acknowledges that "parenting time by video conference or telephone" is an appropriate substitute for in-person parenting time when a parent "must self-quarantine or is otherwise restricted from having contact with others".

The letter seems to reflect the reality that many Massachusetts residents who have displayed coronavirus symptoms have been advised to stay home and self-quarantine without ever receiving a test for the virus. Indeed, many Americans appear to have internalized health officials' recommendations to only seek medical treatment if their symptoms become severe. Consequently, COVID-19 has required a huge number of people - perhaps even a majority of those infected - to "self-diagnose" their illness and engage in voluntary isolation and quarantine efforts without a specific instruction from a physician, much less a formal quarantine order.

The guidance set forth in Judge Casey's letter includes about as much certainty as circumstances allow. In many, maybe even *most* instances of infection with coronavirus, the question of whether a parent "must self-quarantine" or be "otherwise restricted from having contact with others" may prove difficult to demonstrate as a matter of law. Almost by definition, a parent's voluntary self-quarantine based on his or her self-diagnosis represents a vague and highly subjective calculation. When the crisis ends, courts may struggle to hold parents in [contempt](#) for declining to comply with visitation orders if and when the non-compliant parent appeared to have a reasonable basis for believing the other parent and/or the parent's household members should have been self-quarantining or limiting contact with the child. Conversely, Judge Casey's order strongly suggests that Massachusetts parents who simply cancel court-ordered parenting

time based on a generalized fear of the virus could be found in contempt for violating parenting orders during the crisis.

When Does a Shelter-in-Place Order "Prevent" Court Ordered Visitation from Occurring?

In general, most attorneys appear to agree that shelter-in-place and stay-at-home orders broadly supersede the ordinary rights of citizens as a matter of law. Accordingly, most attorneys would likely agree that a strict shelter-in-place order that includes no exception for "court ordered travel", or any reference to parenting time, would probably supersede a parent's right to visitation as a matter of law. (Whether police would choose to prevent parents from visitation exchanges based on the law is a separate question.) Thus, one can imagine a parent effectively arguing that the shelter-in-place order legally supersedes the visitation order, such that non-compliance with a visitation order is legally justifiable.

Of course, as noted above, many state and local shelter-in-place and stay-at-home orders appear to include explicit or implicit exceptions that arguably allow parents to transport children between households without violating the shelter-in-place order. To that end, parents who assume that an active stay-at-home order means they can automatically simply *cancel* court-ordered visits are clearly taking a risk.

In the fast-changing and often confusing legal environment that Americans currently occupy, many courts are likely to show some tolerance for parents who temporarily suspend visitation on a good faith belief that a shelter-in-place order prevented compliance with the visitation order. However, courts are also likely to find that parents have an ongoing duty to comply with court orders when possible. To that end, parents who unilaterally cancel visits based *solely* on shelter-in-place and stay-at-home orders should understand that an incorrect reading of the law could cause legal exposure in the future.

Emergency Orders: When Should Parents Seek Emergency Orders to Suspend (or Enforce) Parenting Time?

Before delving further into the specific reasons that a parent might refuse to comply with court-ordered parenting time based on coronavirus fears, it's important to mention the availability of "emergency orders" in many jurisdictions. As the crisis has unfolded, many (if not most) states have shut down their court systems for ordinary business. However, a great many states continue to allow parties to access the courts by filing an "emergency motion", should the need arise. This begs the question: Does a parent have an obligation to seek an emergency order suspending parenting time before refusing to comply with a court order?

In ordinary times, many attorneys might argue that parents should always seek an emergency order from a court before refusing to comply with an existing custody order. Whether such an obligation exists in the midst of the coronavirus crisis is less clear. Not every court is allowing emergency orders nationwide, and where such relief is available, the definition of what constitutes an "emergency" can vary from court to court. Moreover, even if a court provides a clear definition of what constitutes an emergency, individual courts may elect to hear disputes over the parenting schedule after the crisis ends.

Writing for a national audience, it is impossible to say with certainty when parents have an absolute legal obligation to seek an emergency order before denying court-ordered parenting time with the other parent. Violating a court order is never risk free, and in ordinary times, seeking an emergency order is almost *always* a better idea than simply violating the order unilaterally. However, in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, it also appears naive to suggest that courts are going to find every parent who failed to comply with orders during the crisis will be found in contempt at a later date. Indeed, with many courts refusing in-person hearings - and many citizens scared to leave the house to avoid exposure - there are many practical reasons why a parent would not seek an emergency order.

What is clear for parents is this: If emergency access to a court is available in a parent's jurisdiction, the parent should strongly consider contacting the court and at least speaking with a staff member (or a local attorney) about whether emergency relief is appropriate to seek under the circumstances. *Better safe than sorry*, as the saying goes.

Certainty Matters: How Real is the Risk of Transmission?

As discussed above, there are a variety of legal and procedural issues that parents must consider in the context of parenting time during the coronavirus. For the remainder of this blog, we will focus on substantive issues: That is, when complying with court-ordered parenting time creates a direct risk of harm to parent, child or vulnerable household member.

The first issue to consider when discussing the risk of infection in the visitation and custody context is the threat of transmission to the child. Is there clear evidence that a parent or household member is infected with the virus? If not, is there clear evidence that the parent or household member was directly exposed to a known, infected individual?

The more attenuated the fear of transmission – that is, the less certain you are that the other parent or a household member is actually infected – the more difficult it is to justify the curtailment of parenting time. It's important to recognize how risk factors for transmissions are rapidly changing in real time. A month ago, a parent's travel to Wuhan province may have raised red flags for coronavirus, but today, recent travel to Italy or South Korea - or even Seattle, Washington - poses many of the same concerns. Before long, travel to a neighboring town within your state may raise the same risk. Moreover, as outbreaks appear across the nation, the entire notion of connecting risk of transmission to travel may become outdated.

As further explored below, as transmission of the virus spreads, a parent's behavior or attitude toward coronavirus may become more important than where that parent has traveled. Indeed, amidst a local community outbreak, parents and individuals with dismissive attitudes towards the virus or containment measures (such as social distancing) probably pose a greater risk to the community than the kind of international travel that was perceived as a greater risk in prior months. (A parent who sends an email or text message sarcastically dismissing the other parent's coronavirus concerns may see their [message come back to bite them](#) in a future custody hearing.)

At the end of the day, parents considering a restriction on the other parent's court-ordered parenting time must start with evidence that demonstrates the risk of transmission posed by [the](#)

parenting schedule. In its simplest form, this may be evidence that the other parent or a household member has contracted the virus. If a parent has persuasive evidence that parenting time creates a measurable risk of transmission – or, as further explored below, may expose the child to containment measures – that parent should bring those concerns to the attention of a judge as soon as possible.

Context Matters: When Having Parenting Time Means “Breaking Containment”

If a member of a parent’s household has tested positive for the coronavirus while towns, schools and businesses are engaging in heavy containment efforts, this could have an immediate impact on parenting time. Certainly, one hopes that both parents would agree to take reasonable steps to ensure that a child is not unnecessarily exposed to infected individuals. However, ambiguities may begin to arise when it comes to the formal and informal "rules" announced by school, local governments and businesses - often on short notice - which can impact children and parents. It is important for parents to understand what conditions can trigger a child being held out of school or other activities, as well as employer policies that may result in a parent or household member being forced to miss work because of the child's contacts in the other household.

At the time this blog is written, communities are just ramping up an expanding range of containment measures, including self-quarantine, school closings and private employer policies that limit contact between communities and individuals who are exposed to infected persons. It is quite possible that in the weeks and months ahead, transmission may become so widespread in some communities that containment measures are deemed ineffective. In this scenario, communities would likely treat coronavirus infections like a serious flu outbreak – i.e. with a series of common-sense recommendations, but few formal restrictions on communities.

As long as serious containment measures remain in place, however, these policies are likely to be the starting point for parents with fears about coronavirus transmission being passed through from another parent’s household through their child. If the child’s exposure to an infected person in the other parent’s household would require the child to be self-quarantined for an extended period of time, this may be a strong basis for restricting parenting time. Similarly, if the child’s exposure to an infected person through the other household would require the non-infected parent to self-quarantine or prevent him or her from working, this may form a strong basis for restricting parenting time.

In this context, parents weighing the coronavirus impact must really weigh two factors: First, whether parenting time with other parent directly exposes the child to transmission of the disease. Second, whether parenting time with other parent subjects the child or parent to containment policies, such as the requirement that the child stay home for 14 days after contact with an infected person. In many cases, these concerns will directly overlap. Depending on the language used in containment policies, however, one can imagine scenarios in which a child (and his or her household members) would be subject to varying degrees of quarantine, regardless of whether or not the child is actually carrying the virus.

In assessing these considerations, parents must always remember the rapid pace at which information surrounding the coronavirus tends to change. Ideas that seemed to be common sense

in one week may be outdated or even wrong a week later. Parents must think carefully before declining to comply with court-ordered parenting time, especially when the basis for their decision may grow less justifiable as time passes. For this reason, parents are always advised to attempt to file a motion with the court before engaging in “self-help” by denying parenting time without a court order.

Of course, situations may arise in which it is not feasible for a parent to seek a court’s permission prior to making on parenting time. The risk to parents who decide to deviate from court-ordered parenting time without court approval may be partly driven by a parent’s history. For parents with a solid history of compliance with visitation orders, and co-parenting in general, a decision to withhold parenting time based on sincere health-related concerns may have less serious repercussions, even if the decision may be questioned in hindsight. In contrast, if a parent’s decision to unilaterally withhold parenting time fits into a larger pattern of problematic parenting behavior, that parent may face additional risk, if and when their decision is evaluated by a judge.

An Infected Parent or Household Member: A Clear-Cut Case for Withholding Visits?

Common sense suggests that it may be advisable to limit contact between a child and a parent or home in which a household member is infected by coronavirus. However, even in this seemingly straight-forward scenario, the impact on parenting orders is not clear cut. For example, if the child has been exposed to the infected parent for an extended period of time, sending the child to the other parent’s household may simply cause the spread of the disease to the other parent’s home. Moreover, if the child’s primary parent is infected, but is not incapacitated by the illness, it may make more sense for the child to ride out the infectious period with the primary parent.

Whether an infection within another parent’s household is grounds for canceling visit may depend on numerous factors, including:

- Whether the non-infected parent lives in a community with an outbreak
- Whether any members of the non-infected parent’s household have already been exposed to the virus from other sources
- Whether there are especially vulnerable household members in the non-infected parent’s house
- How widespread disease transmission is in general when the issue arises
- Whether community containment efforts (ranging from social distancing to government quarantines) remain in effect at the time
- Whether exposing the child to an infected person could have practical impacts on the child’s life, such as being unable to move freely between homes

At this point, there are no clear answers regarding when a parent may be justified in withholding court-ordered parenting time based on coronavirus fears. However, common sense suggests that such a decision may be warranted if (a.) there is clear evidence that a parent or household member is infected with the virus, (b.) it appears likely that the child was not previously exposed to the virus, and (c.) the child’s exposure to an infected person could trigger community

containment rules, such as self-quarantine, restrictions of movement, or impacts on a parent's ability to attend work.

What Happens if a Child Risks Spreading the Virus Between Households?

Another scenario parents must consider is whether *the child* is the individual who creates the risk of infection. For example, if the child is exposed to a household member with the virus, should the child stay in the infected home to avoid spreading the virus to an uninfected home? This concern may become especially acute if the child him or herself has tested positive for the virus or if one parent's home contains an especially vulnerable individual, such as an elderly grandparent or individual suffering from heart or lung disease.

There is no clear playbook for handling a scenario in which a child may act as a carrier of a pathogen from parent's household to the other. If this situation arises, it is imperative that parents communicate about all of the risks and options involved, including a careful examination of the calendar to determine when the child is unlikely to be infected after exposure, or, in the case of exposure, how long it will be before the child is unlikely to be contagious.

What if a Parent Becomes Too Sick to Care for a Child?

As more and more individuals become sick, parents should consider forming a plan in case one parent becomes too sick to care for a child. Here is one coronavirus reality to consider: Even if you avoid the virus through social distancing, you might be forced to bring the virus into your home because your sick child's other parent has been hospitalized, and your child is infected with the virus. Decisions like this will only be more difficult if bringing your sick child into your home could expose other vulnerable members of your household to the virus. Nevertheless, this situation is coming - and families who deal with it proactively will be better equipped to handle the fallout.

Needless to say, most parents will do what they need to in order to care for their sick child, including putting themselves in harm's way. However, it makes all the sense in the world for parents - even divorced and estranged parents - to try to come up with a plan *before* anyone gets sick. It is especially important for parents to agree in advance to notify each other if anyone in their respective household becomes infected.

If there is one thing we know about coronavirus is that it can act fast. With governments restricting citizens' movements, particularly those of infected individuals, parents need to understand that extracting a child from the home of a sick or hospitalized parent may not be as easy as it sounds. Communicating and having a plan before the sickness comes is crucial.

Impact of a Parent's Compliance with Precautionary Measures

As noted repeatedly throughout this blog, timing plays a major role when it comes to evaluating the reasonableness of a particular parent's decisions. For example, if one parent lives in a community that is hit by a coronavirus outbreak, while no outbreaks have been detected in the other parent's community, it may make sense for a child to avoid the community with an

outbreak. Conversely, if communities across a given state are experiencing outbreaks, it makes less sense to restrict a child's travel to any particular area.

With a fast-moving disease like coronavirus, an action that may have seemed reasonable on Monday may no longer make sense by Friday of the same week. Herein lies the risk for parents who choose to deny parenting time based on coronavirus fears. The parent's actions that may appear understandable at one moment in time may appear unnecessary or mistaken a few days later. It appears likely that parents who base their decisions on information they hear on the news or social media are more likely to be found in contempt than parents who justify their actions based on advisories from local sources, such as schools, local government or specific employer policies.

An important consideration in this analysis is whether the "at risk" parent has articulated his or her intention to comply with recommendations and precautionary measures to reduce potential transmission to children during an outbreak. For example, the mere existence of an outbreak in the parent's community may not warrant canceling visitation if that parent has expressed his or her intention to avoid community gatherings, follow strict hygiene protocols, and immediately inform the other parent if any person in the household shows symptoms of illness. In contrast, a suspension of parenting time may be warranted for a parent who minimizes the seriousness of the infection, engages in conspiracy theories, or whose actions suggest that he or she is not taking precautions to reduce transmission.

Massachusetts Law on Enforcement of Court-Ordered Parenting Time

In my 2016 blog, [Complaints for Contempt for Violations of Visitation and Custody Orders in Massachusetts](#), I review how Massachusetts courts evaluate alleged violations of parenting orders based on one parent's health-related concerns. The blog included a review of the leading Massachusetts case on this issue, [O'Connell v. Greenwood \(2003\)](#), in which the Appeals Court held that a mother was in contempt for failing to produce the child for a scheduled holiday visit with the father, where mother's claim that the child was too sick to attend was unsupported by sufficient evidence demonstrating that she was unable to comply with the order. Notably, the mother in O'Connell produced several doctor's notes suggesting the child was, indeed, ill at the time of the visit:

The mother, however, asserted that the child was sick during the visitation period, a fact that the father does not dispute, and proffered a physician's note stating that he had seen the child on four occasions between December 29, 1999, and January 19, 2000, and had "instructed mother to restrict his activity to home because of his illness during this period of time." The mother offers the child's illness and the physician's instruction as a permissible basis for her election not to allow the father to have the child during the required visitation period.

However, the Court held that the doctor's notes provided insufficient evidence of the mother's inability to comply with the parenting order:

A putative contemnor may no doubt avoid a finding of contempt if she meets her burden of proving her inability to comply with the relevant court order. But the mother's evidence in this case falls far short of showing an inability to comply. She failed to show, for example, that the sick child could not have rested just as quietly and comfortably with the father as with the mother or that transportation between the mother's house and the father's would have exacerbated his illness or retarded his recovery. There is no showing that she even inquired of the doctor on those subjects. Her failure to do so dooms her effort to upset the contempt judgment on grounds of inability to comply, particularly given the judge's unchallenged finding that the father had "proven ... that he [was] equally capable of addressing [the child's] medical needs" and that the mother "refuses to involve [him] in [the child's] medical treatment." (Citations omitted)

Notably, the Appeals Court in O'Connell repeatedly criticized the mother's history of parental decision-making from prior to the father's complaint for [contempt](#), while focusing heavily on the parties' inability to communicate as co-parents. Major appellate decisions affecting the enforcement of parenting provisions are relatively rare in Massachusetts. Few cases of note have entered on this issue since my blog was published in 2016.

Needless to say, the facts of O'Connell are distinguishable from a hypothetical coronavirus outbreak in which a parent elects to withhold visitation or parenting time from the other parent based on concerns about disease transmission. However, certain principles articulated in the O'Connell case appear applicable. For example, the Appeals Court in O'Connell is very focused on whether evidence existed supporting the mother's claim that withholding visitation was necessary for the child's health. In the coronavirus context, the seriousness of the disease may be common knowledge, but a parent would still need to present persuasive evidence showing that interaction with the other parent poses a *particular* risk to the child. The mere fact that the other parent's town has experienced a coronavirus outbreak may be sufficient grounds for withholding visitation, however, particularly if the parent in the affected area has articulated his or her intention to follow precautionary recommendations. Similarly, the mere fact that a parent (or household member) becomes sick with flu-like symptoms in the midst of an outbreak may not be grounds for withholding visitation absent confirmation that the parent has been exposed to infected individuals.

For Massachusetts parents, the best way to address concerns about the coronavirus and parenting time is through a [Complaint for Modification](#) filed at the Probate and Family Court. Massachusetts judges hear emergency motions on a regular basis and won't hesitate to enter orders to protect children from legitimate health risks.

Violating Court Orders is *Never* Risk-Free

In general, a parent with significant fears about the risk of coronavirus infection during visitation or parenting time should start by communicating their concern to the other parent and seeking a mutually agreeable plan. Even if parents cannot agree on a complete solution, short-term agreements about an upcoming weekend or visit is preferable to one parent unilaterally canceling the other parent's court-ordered parenting time. If no agreement can be reached, parents should

consider filing an emergency motion with their local court, seeking an order permitting a temporary suspension of parenting time.

If filing a motion is impractical or impossible – such as if courts are closed due to coronavirus – parents should know that failing to comply with court-ordered parenting time is never risk-free. As noted throughout this blog, the coronavirus presents a fluid factual situation, in which information that seems reliable on one day may prove inaccurate a few days later. For example, a parent may prevent visitation with other parent due to coronavirus fears, only to come down with the virus him or herself a few days later. How a court reacts to that parent’s decision at a subsequent hearing will depend on a variety of factors, ranging from the certainty of the risk the parent was seeking to avoid, documentation of containment efforts that affected the decision, and that parent’s own history of co-parenting and compliance with visitation orders. For this reason, it can’t be reinforced enough that parents should attempt to seek permission from the court whenever possible before unilaterally restricting parenting time based on virus-related fears.

More Coronavirus Coverage from Lynch & Owens

The attorneys of Lynch & Owens have been blogging about the impact of the coronavirus on divorce and family law issues, as well as Massachusetts Probate & Family Courts, since the earliest days of the pandemic. Our coverage has been featured in the [New York Times](#) and the [Boston Globe](#). Check out the links below for more Covid-19 coverage from Lynch & Owens.

Coronavirus Impacts on Family Law:

- [Nine Ways to Plan for Divorce During Quarantine](#) (5/13/20)
- [Ask Our Attorneys: How has the Coronavirus Impacted Family Law in Massachusetts?](#) (5/6/20)
- [Coronavirus News: Enforcing Child Support and Alimony Orders During the Crisis](#) (4/7/20)
- [Massive Coronavirus Layoffs Trigger Child Support and Alimony Reductions Across MA and US](#) (3/19/20 with updates)
- [Coronavirus Court Closures: How Covid-19 is Shutting Courts in Divorce and Family Law Cases](#) (3/14/20 with updates)
- [Can Coronavirus Fears Allow Parents to Cancel Court-Ordered Visitation?](#) (3/2/20 with multiple updates)

Massachusetts Probate & Family Court Updates:

- [Coronavirus News: Mass. Probate & Family Courts Release Tidal Wave of New Rules](#) (4/9/20 with multiple updates)
- [Coronavirus News: County-by-County Info for Massachusetts Probate & Family Courts](#) (3/26/20 with multiple updates)
- [Massachusetts Trial Court Announces Comprehensive Response to Coronavirus for MA Courts](#) (3/15/20 with updates)

Mediation and Coronavirus:

- [Mediation is the Best Divorce Option During the Coronavirus Crisis](#) (4/15/20)
- [Court Filings and Covid-19: How to File Agreements in MA Probate & Family Courts During Crisis](#) (4/9/20)
- [Surviving Coronavirus: Video Mediation for Divorce and Family Law Issues](#) (3/19/20)

Other media featuring Lynch & Owens and coronavirus:

- [NY Times: For Divorced Parents, Navigating Coronavirus Is a Balancing Act](#) (3/27/20)
- [Boston Globe: For divorced couples with children, coronavirus creates added challenges](#) (4/10/20)

A Message to Our Readers Outside of Massachusetts

As a Massachusetts law firm, much of the information provided in our blogs is tailored to Massachusetts law and practices. Although portions of this and our other [blogs covering coronavirus-related issues](#) are likely to be broadly applicable outside of Massachusetts, it is important to note that every state has its own specific body of law and domestic relations best practices that can differ from Massachusetts in important ways. The options available to individuals facing domestic relations concerns during the coronavirus outbreak may also be greatly impacted by [local court closures](#) and government restrictions that are specific to your area, such as state-mandated quarantine and shelter in place orders. Please consult with a legal professional in your state for guidance.



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Jason V. Owens
Partner & Senior Counsel

Coronavirus Related Legal Services at Lynch & Owens

Lynch & Owens has adjusted our service delivery model in response to the coronavirus crisis. In addition to providing traditional divorce and family representation, during the outbreak, we are focused on delivering rapid-response legal services (including same-day service) to clients facing emergency financial and child-related issues, as well as assisting self-represented clients with document preparation and filings while the courts are closed for most regular business.

Clients can schedule same-day, 1-hour paid consultations with our attorneys by phone and we are accepting retainers as low as \$750 for additional consultation services. We are also offering same-day video mediation for parents, spouses and former spouses who are seeking to mediate

coronavirus-related issues such as visitation, parenting time, and child support and alimony orders impacted by layoffs and unemployment. Our staff and attorneys have full remote access to all our office's resources in the event of mandatory quarantine or shelter-in-place order.

Please see our dedicated [Coronavirus Legal Services page](#) and [Coronavirus Mediation Services page](#) for more about services provided by Lynch & Owens and South Shore Divorce Mediation during the coronavirus crisis.

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Schedule a consultation with [Jason V. Owens](#) today at [\(781\) 253-2049](tel:7812532049) or send [him an email](#).

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