

## COVID-19 Employee FAQ

Out of an abundance of caution, the City of Spokane is taking the following precautionary measures in response to COVID-19. Employees should also reference City Policy ADMIN 0620-09-21, Life Threatening Illnesses and Contagious Diseases.

**1. What is COVID-19/Coronavirus?**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that usually cause mild respiratory illnesses such as the common cold. Some coronaviruses have caused more severe illness, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). SARS-CoV-2 is a new coronavirus (responsible for COVID-19) that was not identified in humans before December 2019.

**2. What are common symptoms of COVID-19 illness?**

Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath. It takes 2 to 14 days after a person gets the virus in their body to become ill. Novel coronavirus is new, and we are learning more each day about symptoms it causes and how long it takes for people to become sick.

**3. How does the virus spread?**

Most often, it is spread from person-to-person via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how flu and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

It's currently unclear if a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. Often, with most respiratory viruses, people are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest) but there is some indication of spread by individuals who are not exhibiting typical symptoms.

**4. Who should seek medical evaluation for COVID-19?**

*Individuals who are:*

- a. Ill with a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have traveled from an affected area in the last 14 days
- b. Ill with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing AND have been identified by Public Health as a recent close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case or had recent close contact with someone who is being evaluated for COVID-19 infection.

**5. What can I do to prevent COVID-19 illnesses in my workplace?**

- a. Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work for 7 days or 72 hours after fever is gone and symptoms get better, whichever is longer. Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- b. If employees are off work because they are sick, the employees illness leave banks will be utilized. **An exception will be made to allow employees access to their FMLA/OJI sick leave bank without FMLA documentation through April 24, 2020, subject to change depending on information provided by officials.** Employees must indicate to their supervisor or payroll clerk which sick leave bank they wish to use.

- c. If employees are no longer sick, but remain home on a self-quarantine they will be authorized and directed to telecommute or work from home, if their work assignment allows for it. If employees are not able to telecommute or work from home due to their specific duties, paid emergency leave will be authorized for a period of 72 hours per CDC's recommendations. If employees choose to remain off work for longer than 72 hours due to a self-quarantine, their personal leave balances must be utilized.
- d. The CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day **should be encouraged to go home immediately**. If an employee goes home sick, their sick leave balances will be utilized. Telecommuting is not an option while an employee is sick, as the focus should be on the employees' health and recovery.

**6. Will employees be informed if a coworker has tested positive for COVID-19?**

- a. Yes. If an employee discloses to their supervisor that they have tested positive for COVID-19, the work group will be informed they may have had possible exposure. Employees exposed to a sick coworker should monitor themselves for symptoms, practice good hygiene and go home/stay home sick if they display any symptoms of illness. The confidentiality of the sick employee will be maintained as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and HIPAA protections. Under no circumstances is it appropriate to disclose an employee's medical condition with anyone other than Human Resources.

Workplace rumors about an employee's COVID-19 status are inappropriate, and unacceptable. Just as it is not appropriate for management to discuss or disclose an employees medical condition, it is equally inappropriate for employees to speculate, discuss or otherwise gossip about a coworkers medical condition or status. If employee gossip does not cease after it is addressed, further action may be warranted, including discipline.

**7. When can someone who has COVID-19 return to work?**

- a. If an employee has tested positive for COVID-19, they should remain under home isolation precautions for 7 days OR until 72 hours after fever is gone and symptoms get better, whichever is longer.
- b. If an employee has had a fever with cough or shortness of breath but have not been exposed to someone with COVID-19 and have not tested positive for COVID-19, they should stay home away from others until 72 hours after the fever is gone and symptoms get better.

**8. Work Related Travel**

City of Spokane employee travel for training, conferences, etc. through April 24, 2020 will be cancelled. This is an emerging issue, and out of an abundance of precaution these measures must be taken. Employee travel beyond April 24, 2020 will be evaluated and an update will be provided by the end of the month.

Please notify your supervisor if you had scheduled travel for work through April 24<sup>th</sup> to begin the cancellation process. The costs associated with cancelling travel will not be considered as a factor to justify attendance.

## 9. Employee Personal Travel

- a. Employees are encouraged to check the CDC's Traveler's Health Notices for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country citizens may travel. This can be found on the [CDC website](#).
- b. Employees are advised to check themselves for symptoms of acute respiratory illness before starting travel and to notify your supervisor and stay home if you are sick.
- c. Employees who become sick while traveling should notify their supervisor and promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.
- d. If outside the United States, sick employees experiencing an urgent or emergent episode should go to the nearest emergency facility. If admitted to the hospital, employees must notify their insurance company within 24 hours:
  - i. Kaiser Permanente of Washington: 1-888-457-9516 (follow-up care needs to be rendered in a Kaiser Permanente service area.)
  - ii. Premera Blue Cross: 1-800-810-BLUE (2583); BlueCard Worldwide Service Center to locate doctors and hospitals in over 200 countries worldwide.
  - iii. It is unlikely the provider will bill the insurance company. If you pay for medical services rendered, be sure to obtain as much detailed information as possible from the provider relating to the medical care received, date of service, procedure rendered, amount paid, etc. so you can submit to your insurance company for determination of reimbursement.
- e. Employees who are traveling are encouraged to receive all recommended vaccinations, including influenza. It's not too late to vaccinate.
- f. **Employees who have traveled outside the United States within the last 14-days, or have plans to travel outside the United States need to notify their supervisor immediately. Employees who have traveled to countries with confirmed COVID-19 cases, or who have had known exposure while traveling to individuals who have shown signs of illness may be placed on a 14-day quarantine from the workplace upon their return, regardless of whether they present symptoms of illness. City officials, with the advice of healthcare providers, will make the decision to quarantine.** Decisions to quarantine will be done a case-by-case basis, dependent upon the circumstances present. This measure is being taken out of an abundance of caution. If employees are able to telecommute, or otherwise perform work from home, arrangements will be made to accommodate that. If employees are not able to telecommute or perform any work from home, the employee will be placed on leave for the 14-day period. Please notify your supervisor if you have planned travel outside of the United States so that your supervisor can help you prepare for working from home or additional leave.

## 10. What if I must stay home to care for my child due to the closure of their school?

The Washington State Sick Leave law, RCW 49.46.210 allows employees to take paid leave, including sick leave, to care for a child due to a school closed by a public official or for any health-related reason. An exception will be made to allow employees access to their FMLA/OJI sick leave bank without FMLA documentation through April 24, 2020, subject to change depending on information provided by officials. Employees may also be allowed to telecommute for this purpose. Requests to

telecommute should be made to your supervisor. Additional options available to employees impacted by childcare include:

- a. **Natural Disaster Leave:** Local 270, Local 270-PA, M&P A/B, Police Guild and Lieutenants and Captains Association's Collective Bargaining Agreements provide for Natural Disaster Leave in the event of a natural disaster that creates an emergency beyond the employee's control. Upon request, an employee may be granted up to three (3) days leave of absence with full pay not charged to sick leave, vacation, or another leave bank, to make household adjustments or to make temporary arrangements to resolve the problem.

Due to COVID-related household emergencies affecting many of our employees who must take leave to tend to emergency situations that could not be done during off-duty time, we have created a Natural Disaster Leave application form which extends the typical forty-eight (48) submittal time frame to fourteen (14) days to ensure adequate time to review and process applications. The form must be completed by the employee and approved by the department head and Human Resources; approved leave can be retroactively applied to prior pay periods as needed. The form can be filled out electronically or manually and, upon employee and department head signature, should be routed to Human Resources. Forms completed by the department can be submitted electronically to [erahrclerks@spokanecity.org](mailto:erahrclerks@spokanecity.org) along with any questions about the process.

- b. For employees with less than 240 hours (6 weeks) of available combined leave, the following options may be considered if telecommuting is not an option and they have or will run out of leave:
  - i. **Make application for shared leave donations.** Shared leave donations used for childcare purposes during this period of pandemic illness will not count toward the employee's lifetime shared leave usage. Employees should contact their HR Analyst if they are interested in seeking shared leave donations. The shared leave bank may not be accessed for purposes of childcare.
  - ii. **Reduced workweek to an 80% schedule (32 hrs/week) for the duration of the school closure.** The purpose of this schedule extends paid time off accruals, while allowing an employee to maintain City provided benefits. The employee's FTE schedule will be reduced to 32 hrs/workweek, and sick and vacation accruals will be adjusted to reflect this reduction. Employees should be aware their paycheck will be reduced by 8 hrs/week under this reduced FTE schedule.
- c. Employees may request a modified work schedule to accommodate childcare needs. Requests for modification are authorized on a case by case basis, depending on the circumstances, department needs, etc. If you are interested in seeing if this is an option for you, you are encouraged to discuss it with your supervisor.

**11. What if I am considered "high risk" and do not want to come to work based on fear of contracting COVID-19 and I choose to self-quarantine?**

If the City is notified that an employee has a medical impairment that compromises their immune system in such a way that exposure to a virus may create a "direct threat" of harm to the employee, it may be necessary to engage in the interactive process under the ADA to determine the nature of the employee's medical status and need for accommodation. Employees in this situation may have the ability to telecommute. Based on the outcome of the ADA process the City will determine the

appropriate accommodation for the employee. Employees in this situation need to contact their supervisor immediately so that the ADA process through Human Resources may be initiated.

**12. What if I am considered “healthy” but do not want to come to work based on fear of contracting COVID-19 and I choose to self-quarantine?**

Departments such as Public Safety and Public Works need to make sure that we continue to serve the public, and each department is identifying essential and non-essential employees and minimum staffing necessary to maintain public services. Should a non-essential employee elect to self-quarantine they will either be required to telecommute if that is an option, or use paid leave balances in order to remain in a paid status. The employee should discuss the circumstances with their supervisor and determine if there is telecommute work that can be performed from home, or if the employees paid leave balances will be used.

**13. Is telecommuting an option for me?**

An employee’s ability to telecommute is dependent upon their job duties, available equipment, etc. Each division will be compiling a list of the employees that will be authorized to telecommute. Employees should contact their supervisor if they wish to request to telecommute. The telecommute agreement requirement will be waived during this period, however requests to telecommute will be approved on a case by case basis dependent upon the employee’s ability to perform essential job functions remotely. Work performance standards will be established by the department, and must be met in order to telecommute remotely. Employees shifts will remain status quo, and employees must be available via Skype, email, telephone, etc. while telecommuting. Telecommuting may also be approved on a part time, or less than full time basis based on the departments authorization.

The current authority for broad telecommuting authorizations is exclusive to this period of pandemic illness, and is not intended to set precedent. Cases of pandemic illness will be assessed on a case by case basis, and management will determine the most appropriate means to conduct City business at that time, and for that specific period. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, normal City operations will resume. Officials will provide further communication in this regard.

**14. Telecommuting Tips for Employees**

Employees new to telecommuting often learn that working remotely is different than they expected and that it requires specific skills and habits. The following tips will help you get to work while at home:

- a. **Define your workspace.** It can be easy to sit on the sofa with your laptop and expect to get work done. Experienced telecommuters will tell you they tried that and it simply doesn’t work! We are creatures of habit and most of us are used to lounging with our laptops to read the news, watch TV, play games and chat with friends and family. Establishing a workspace, even if it is your kitchen table, gives your brain a cue that it is time for work and not play.
- b. **Master the basics.** Add your telecommute schedule to your email signature line.
  - i. Set up call forwarding and how to access your voicemail from home.
  - ii. Know how to remote into the City network and other online tools you regularly use.
  - iii. Use Skype instant messaging to stay connected to coworkers.

- iv. Plan for a video calls/meetings by making sure you know how to turn on your computer's camera and microphone and being aware that your colleagues may be able to see the background behind you.
- c. **Set daily goals, track them and share your progress.** You may be surprised by how differently the work day passes without the comings and goings of an office to break things up or influence what you do next. Start each day of telecommuting by writing down what you need to achieve and then track your progress. Pay attention to how long tasks take you and start adjusting your daily goals to match your current rhythm. Communicate with your supervisor and/or coworkers if you think your telecommute plan needs to be adjusted.
- d. **Eliminate distractions.** If home is where your heart is then telecommuting can mean pets, children or a favorite hobby are only a few feet away. Depending on your living arrangement, you may need to hang a "do not disturb" sign so your family members don't interrupt you. Pets often need a closed door to keep them away and you might need headphones to block the neighborhood noise.
- e. **Prioritize privacy.** Whether you are in your home or a common area, take five minutes to assess the privacy of your workspace. Can someone standing behind you read your computer screen? Are your windows open so your neighbor can hear your phone call? What information do you need to secure before grabbing a cup of coffee or heading to the restroom? Your personal privacy matters too, so see if there anything around you that would not want visible during a video conference with your boss.
- f. **Stay connected.** Many people say they do not call or instant message coworkers who are working remotely because they don't want to bother them. Remember, they are working, not vacationing at home! You should feel confident about calling or messaging an employee who is telecommuting anytime you would walk to their office or call them if you were working on-site. You can even keep your daily coffee run – simply plan to call or video chat with a cup in hand at the time your crew would normally walk to your favorite espresso cart.
- g. **Dress for work.** Just like sitting on the couch can make us feel a little too relaxed, wearing pajamas all day makes it hard to get into work mode. Dressing casually is definitely a perk of working at home but getting "ready for work" is a daily ritual that many telecommuters swear by.

**15. Will I be eligible for Workers Compensation benefits if I contract COVID-19 while at work?**

Governor Jay Inslee has allowed Workers Compensation coverage to include healthcare workers and first responders who are quarantined by a physician or public health officer after they have been exposed to COVID-19 on the job. Workers Compensation can include medical testing, treatment expenses or provide time-loss payments for those that cannot work while quarantined. This allowance is specific to first responders (Police and Fire at the City) at this time.

**16. Tools for Social Distancing at Work**

- a. Continuing City operations to the largest, yet safest extent possible is of primary importance. As such, the following are recommendations to limit social interaction and exposure, while continuing the work of the City:
  - i. Employees should limit their physical attendance at offsite meetings.
- b. Employees should give consideration and use their best judgement to determine whether meetings (including those internally amongst work groups) are necessary, if they can be held virtually, or if they can be postponed altogether as a non-immediate need at this time.
- c. In lieu of in-person meetings, the following tools are available to City employees:

- i. Email: Appropriate for more direct or less complex matters that could be effectively resolved via a reasonable email communication exchange.
- ii. Teleconference
- iii. Skype Instant Messaging
- iv. Skype Video

**17. I had to cancel my scheduled vacation as a result of COVID-19, and as a result will exceed my annual vacation accrual maximum. Will a vacation accrual extension be considered?**

- a. Yes, the City will allow vacation accrual extensions if employees had scheduled vacations that were canceled as a result of the COVID-19 response. Employees should follow the existing City protocol to request an extension, including an explanation of why they were prevented from using their leave. Demonstration of requested leave that was canceled is required.