

From: [Mayor](#)
To: [All City Users](#)
Subject: COVID-19 Update: More Vaccines Coming to Spokane
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Julie Woodward

The City of Spokane **COVID-19 News Update for Jan. 19**

Information about Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID-19) is evolving rapidly. We want to make sure our City employees have up-to-date information. We will provide this update, as needed, to communicate what you need to know, while we work to reduce the spread of this disease in our community and continue to provide critical public services.

A Message from Mayor Woodward

Spokane received some good news in making the COVID vaccine more readily available to people in our community. As the state advances to the next phase of vaccination eligibility, the Spokane Arena will become one of the very few initial locations in the state for widespread administration of the vaccine. Your personal health care provider also will be able to assist you in receiving the vaccine.

Taking the next steps mean anyone 65 and older is immediately eligible to receive the vaccine along with those 50 and older who live in multi-generational households. So far, our health care providers and first responders have already received the vaccine and remain eligible if they have not yet received it.

We appreciate that the state has prioritized Spokane. Greater access to the vaccine keeps us moving forward in our community fight against the spread of the virus. We are all anxious to safely advance as a community and the combination of mask wearing, watching our distance, limiting our gatherings, and wider-spread access to vaccination is the way we accomplish that.

Those most at risk of contracting the virus have been prioritized in the state's vaccine administration plan, which is also informed by federal public health guidance. The sooner we get on top of protecting those who are most at risk, the healthier our community will be.

Spokane continues to be an innovator and collaborator that seeks partnership to fight the spread of the virus and limit the impact to our healthcare system. CHAS health care has been operating a drive-up testing site at the Arena for weeks now, and that demonstrated ability to accomplish that mission in a safe and orderly way has undoubtedly helped Spokane be a leader in access to the vaccine.

Spokane continues to impress in its ability to come together, work together, and stay healthy together. Continuing that is what it will take to get us through this global pandemic.

Flexible Spending Account Extensions

The City is, once again, making every effort to ease the financial burden on employees during the

pandemic. We understand COVID-19 has had a tremendous impact on many employees who contributed to a Flexible Spending Account (FSA) in 2020; a great number of you have monies left over in your Dependent Care and/or Health Care Account.

As you know, if you have not incurred the Dependent Care expenses by December 31, 2020, those monies are forfeited. If you have not incurred the Health Care expenses by March 15, 2021, those monies are forfeited. In an effort to provide assistance to you, the City is offering an extension for you to use those 2020 monies beyond the above-mentioned deadlines. As a one-time exception, you can incur qualified Dependent Care and/or Health Care expenses by June 30, 2021. You must submit those expenses no later than July 15, 2021.

If you participate in the 2021 FSA and you have monies left in your 2020 FSA, monies will be taken from the 2020 account first in an effort to bring your account(s) to a zero balance. If you have questions, please contact Employee Benefits at 625-6565 or eracb@spokanecity.org.

Concerns around the Presidential Inauguration

Most of you have been following the national news headlines closely and are aware of the nationwide concerns for civil unrest around this week's presidential inauguration. Spokane police are working with local, state, and federal partners to monitor the situation and share information. While there is no information that suggests planned activity centered around City Hall or other City facilities, we recognize that the downtown core has become a target of disruptive activities over the past several months.

While City business will continue as normal this week, the public entrances to City Hall will be closed and locked. Your supervisors will be work with you to develop communication plans and to discuss modifications to operations, including your work location, should events take place that could disrupt your ability to report to your regular worksite or to carry out your regular duties. The City will be monitoring events closely, and we will communicate any potential safety concerns if identified.

COVID in the Workplace

Our Human Resources team has updated their [COVID in the Workplace FAQ sheet](#) to provide us all with current information. Additionally, they have set up the [HR COVID Response Team](#); the team will answer questions submitted by email within 24 hours, seven days a week. Here's that email: erahrcovidr@spokanecity.org.

Getting a COVID test covered by insurance

For a COVID-19 Test to be covered by Kaiser Permanente or Premera Blue Cross, the following must occur:

- The test must be ordered by a provider.
- The test must be medically necessary (due to exposure or you are experiencing specific symptoms).
- The test must be provided at an in-network site/location.

If the above criteria is met, you and/or your qualified and enrolled eligible dependents will have deductibles, coinsurance and copayments waived for COVID-19 related evaluation, tests and treatment through March 31, 2021.

If you receive an Explanation of Benefits (EOB) from Kaiser Permanente or Premera Blue Cross or a bill from a provider relating to COVID-19 testing and you do not understand why you are being billed, there could be myriad of reasons. Those reasons could include that a provider did not order the test, the test location does

not bill insurance, the test was not medically necessary (no symptoms and/or no exposure), or the claim was not coded properly, etc. A COVID test without insurance could cost around \$150.

Please contact the Customer Service Department at Kaiser Permanente @ 1-888-901-4636 or Premera Blue Cross @ 1-800-722-1471 to seek clarification.

More Information to Assist Our Employees

Here are some more resources from our Employee Assistance Program:

- [Community Violence: The Effects on Children and Teens](#)

Community violence includes many events. It might be a stranger using physical threat or direct violence to take something or hurt someone. It can also be violence between family members, close partners, or peers. Most of the attention from media and research is on community violence that involves adults. However, many children and teens face violence in their neighborhoods and schools. Such violence can have an effect on children.

- [Controlling Anxious Thoughts in Difficult Times](#)

During this challenging time, it's no surprise that the number of employees accessing their employee wellbeing resources is on the rise. One program of our EAP program called Workplace Options (WPO) experienced a 27 percent increase in calls over two weeks from employees seeking emotional support. Callers are reporting feelings of fear and anxiety. The uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus seems to be a common concern. The coronavirus pandemic is a global crisis, and feelings of stress, sadness, anger, and confusion are normal reactions. While many often focus on the negatives, an emergency can also be an opportunity for positive change.

To access more topics related to COVID-19 visit: [EAPHelpLink.com](https://www.eaphelp.com), using company code: **CITSPO**

Employee Information Portal (covid19.spokanecity.org/)

Remember, this Employee Information Portal is a great resource for employees to stay current on what's happening with the COVID-19 response. The [Employee Information Portal](https://covid19.spokanecity.org/) can be accessed from work or home, using a computer or mobile device. All of the emailed information we have sent to employees is archived here.