



*Valerie Woodward*

The City of Spokane

## Weekly News Update for March 30

*Information about Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID-19) is evolving rapidly, and our important work as a City is continuing. We want to make sure our City employees have up-to-date information on both COVID and employee news. 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**

Our community has taken an orderly next step in safely and methodically increasing the options and capacity for activities. We very much appreciate that people are still taking the personal precautions they need to for the betterment of public health and the continued opportunity for our businesses and schools to safely remain open.

Demand for vaccine appointments also remains strong locally even as the eligibility criteria broadens. Information about vaccine eligibility is can be found at [doh.wa.gov](https://doh.wa.gov).

Personal practices and vaccinations are the two most critical elements to continuing the progress that has our case counts as low as they have been since September and our healthcare system operating at a manageable level. So, thank you for your continued commitment to your community.

We remain strong advocates for more local decision-making and input as it relates to the health and safety of our community. The shift to Phase 3 statewide moved evaluation of our progress back to the county level and we remain in regular communication with the Governor's Office and other mayors around our region about next steps.

I have also joined mayors from across the country in requesting that the federal government begin allocating a quantity of vaccine directly to municipalities. As locally elected officials, we know our communities and, in partnership with local public health officials, can help direct vaccines where they are most needed.

A direct allocation would be consistent with how federal relief funds are coming to Spokane. The City will receive about \$80 million in additional federal pandemic relief. That money can be used to help those in the community who need help remaining in their homes, covering household expense, keeping their families fed, and operating a struggling business. More information on how those dollars will be allocated and deployed into the community will be coming soon.

Your hard work is paying off and we are making good progress. Thank you.

## Vaccines: Paid time for appointments

Many City employees will become eligible for vaccines in coming days and weeks. Numerous community resources are available to receive a vaccine, and the City would like to ensure that employees have flexibility in obtaining the vaccine.

Similar to the flu vaccine, employees will be allowed to get the COVID-19 vaccine during their shift or normal working hours, without use of their leave accruals.

- Use of paid time must be pre-authorized by the employee's supervisor and arranged for a mutually agreeable time that creates the least impact to the workplace.
- Proof of appointment is required. Proof of appointment can be obtained through the online scheduling system. Employees can either print, email or show proof of appointment to their supervisor on their smart phone.
- Employees are only authorized paid time to obtain the vaccine. If they show signs or symptoms following the vaccine administration, they must use their personal leave accruals for additional time off.
- Paid time is only authorized for employees who are able to get their vaccine during their normal shift. Employees will not be eligible for overtime if they obtain the vaccine on personal time.

## Vaccines: More employees eligible

On March 31<sup>st</sup> Tiers 3 and 4 of Phase 1B become eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. This includes adding the following groups to the existing eligibility pool:

- People **16 years or older** with 2 or more co-morbidities or underlying conditions
- All people **60 years and older**
- People, staff and volunteers in certain congregate living settings; correctional facilities; group homes for people with disabilities; settings where people experiencing homelessness live or access services
- High-Risk critical workers in certain congregate settings; restaurants, food services, **construction** and **manufacturing**. *Many City field employees in water, wastewater, and streets, etc., qualify under the construction and manufacturing sectors.*

Here's how to proceed:

- Self-assess your eligibility under the [open phases](#). A great way to find out when you are eligible to get the vaccine is to use the [state's "Phase Finder" tool](#). Use of the tool can be **required** when seeking a vaccine at some clinics through the end of the month.
- [Vaccinate WA](#) can be utilized to find COVID-19 vaccine appointments in Washington state.
- Here is [information](#) to sign up for appointments at the clinic at the Spokane Arena.
- Also, **veterans** are eligible to get the vaccine. Connect with the [VA Medical Center](#) to check for appointments.

## Check your Withholding for Federal Income Tax

With tax season upon us, it is a good reminder to check your paystubs to make sure your tax withholding is sufficient and make adjustments if needed. In 2020 the IRS updated the format of the W-4. The IRS recommends you perform a “paycheck checkup” to see if you need to make adjustments to your current withholding. To conduct the checkup, you can use the IRS’s Tax Withholding Estimator (<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/tax-withholding-estimator>). To effectively use the estimator, it is helpful to have a copy of your most recent pay stub and tax return.

The IRS has also published Frequently Asked Questions that may give you a better understanding of the changes you are making as you complete the form (<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/faqs-on-the-2020-form-w-4>). If you decide to change your withholding, here’s what you need to do in the [City’s HR/PeopleSoft system](#).

## More Information to Assist Our Employees

*Here are some more resources from our Employee Assistance Program:*

- [Controlling Anxious Thoughts in Difficult Times](#)  
The coronavirus pandemic is a global crisis, and feelings of stress, sadness, anger, and confusion are normal reactions. It takes time to adapt to a situation and to create new ways to respond to it. While many often focus on the negatives, an emergency can also be an opportunity for positive change.
- [Five ways to stop an anxiety spiral](#)  
Anxious moments happen to everyone. But they do not have to take over. Having strategies to calm yourself down and re-center can make all the difference. Need some help finding ways to bring your anxiety level down? Dayna Y. Jondal, M.A., NBC-HWC, a resiliency specialist at Mayo Clinic Healthy Living Program, has strategies that can work. Experiment with some of these strategies and find out which ones work best for you.

To access more topics related to COVID-19 visit: [EAPHelpLink.com](https://EAPHelpLink.com), using company code: **CITSP0**

## Employee Information Portal ([covid19.spokanecity.org/](https://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](#) 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.