

The City of Spokane

Weekly News Update for Nov. 16

Information about 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

Pressure and stress are interesting conditions. Both can be self-induced and sneak up when you least expect it. Rarely do they come from a single source. The cumulative effects are oftentimes paralyzing and the effects are as varied as they are wide.

The demands are everywhere. At work. At home. In social circles. From family.

And with more people working from home the lines between each are easily blurred, offering little relief in places that are typically safe refuges.

Signs show up in different ways. Overwhelm at the things on your plate. Shortness of patience. Frustration over missed assignments and deadlines. Concern for letting others down.

As the concern grows, self-care is vitally important, especially as we approach a second holiday season still immersed in a pandemic. The ever-changing environment we currently live in adds another layer of complexity to the challenges we deal with on a regular basis, making situations that are typically manageable much more monumental.

Taking a few minutes for yourself to escape the daily and sometimes minute-to-minute grinds and demands, stepping back to pause for a breath, to refocus and re-engage will help work through the demands. Outside of the mounting moments, set aside time to do the things that relax and relieve the stress, even if only for a few minutes.

While looking after yourself, be careful to avoid shutting others out. Listen carefully and closely and really consider what others around you are going through and telling you. Be intentional about staying connected to those closest to you as a mutual support to your shared well-being.

The strain of the pandemic has been difficult and the pressures of the holiday season can add to an already challenging time. Take time as the year winds down to reset and restart in the new year.

Health Risk Assessment

Does your position fall under one of the below Associations or Unions?

Your collective bargaining agreement requires you to complete a Health Risk Assessment under your health insurance plan in order to avoid being charged a monthly \$30 Administration Fee. The Health Risk Assessment should be **completed by Tuesday, Nov. 30**.

- Managerial & Professional A & B
- Mayor
- Fire Managerial
- Exempt-Confidential
- City Council
- City Council Staff
- Judges
- Court Commissioners
- Local 270 Prosecuting Attorneys

Employees who complete the annual online Health Risk Assessment will have their monthly Benefit Administration Fee waived for the 2022 plan year. **(Benefits Administration fee is \$30 a month/\$360 a year)**

Premera Members

Premera members must send a copy of their Completion Certificate to the [Employee Benefits Department](#).

After signing into your account at ([Premera.com](#)) go to Benefits Coverage>Wellness Tools>Start Wellness Tools>Health Risk Assessment tile

Kaiser Permanente Members

After signing into your account ([kp.org/wa](#)), go to the "Health Profile" tile on the bottom of the main page. Click on "Complete your Health Profile"

The **Health Risk Assignment should be completed during Oct. 27 – Nov. 30, 2021** If you experience problems logging in, please call the Benefits Department at 509-625-6565.

Mandatory Payroll Tax Effective Jan. 1, 2022

Taxation of employees in Washington state for the new WA Cares Fund (Long-Term Care Tax) begins in January 2022. The one-time opt-out period has ended. To qualify for an exemption from the tax, you must have purchased a private Long-Term Care plan and have the plan in force prior to November 1, 2021. If you have done so, below are the necessary steps to obtain an exemption. Please read carefully:

1. [Create a SAW account](#). This account also provides you access to Paid Family Medical Leave benefits.
 - If you have used Unemployment, Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML) benefits or renewed vehicle tabs online in the past, you should already have a SAW account.
2. Visit [WA Cares Fund](#) to complete an exemption application.
 - You are attesting that you have individual coverage. At this time, no specific information regarding your policy is needed. **However**, it is our understanding, the State is creating an auditing program for exempt residents.
 - Proof of ID will be required. Please have this image ready to upload beforehand.

3. **Once approved, kindly submit a copy of your exemption approval letter to Accountingpayroll@spokanecity.org.**

- Your exemption letter must be submitted prior to December 31, 2021 to ensure you are not paying the tax beginning January 2022. Please allow additional time for Payroll to process.
- The turnaround time for receiving this letter, after completing your application, can fluctuate. The letter will be mailed to you and uploaded to your SAW account.

Important things to note:

- Employee Benefits nor Payroll are not able to assist with your login credentials to SAW.
- The WA Cares Fund Exemption website is overloaded and occasionally crashes; the best times to access the site is evenings and weekends.
- If you do not submit your letter of exemption by December 31, 2021, you will be required to pay the tax through, at minimum, March 31, 2022. Payroll can only remove the tax, on behalf of an employee, quarterly.
- A screenshot that you have submitted an exemption will not suffice, you must provide the official letter to be exempt from the tax.

The City of Spokane Payroll Department and Employee Benefits Department have no additional information to share other than referring you to the [WA Cares Fund website](#).

Paid Family Medical Leave Rate Change Effective Jan. 1, 2022

For the first time since Paid Family and Medical Leave launched, the **premium rate will increase**. This change goes into effect Quarter 1 of 2022. The split of the employer and employee share of the premium rates will also change in the new year.

Starting January 1, 2022, the premium rate will be 0.6%.

The new premium rate of 0.6% takes effect on Jan. 1, 2022. But for now, the current rate of 0.4% is in effect until Dec. 31, 2021.

Employers will pay approximately 27% of the total premium and employees will pay about 73%. For more information on Paid Family and Medical Leave, [click here](#).

Salvation Army's 4th Annual Corporate Kettle Kick-Off

The City of Spokane has been challenged to ring a bell and fill the red kettle both in-person and [online](#). Help us support The Salvation Army by making a donation to our team's [virtual red kettle](#). You can also donate in person on Thursday, Nov. 18, as City employees ring the bell in front of River Park Square. By simply ringing a bell during this year's Corporate Kettle Kick-Off, we receive the satisfaction of knowing we are helping local vulnerable children, women and men.



More Information to Assist You

Here are some more resources from our Employee Assistance Program:

- [Parents: Invest in Your Relationships](#)

Many parents forget that in order to give to their kids, they must give to each other first. When parents do give to each other first, it is as if they are recharging their batteries so that they then have more energy to give to their children.

- [Successful Stepparenting](#)

The blending of two families is never easy. Children harbor memories of a family that once existed and has now been replaced because of a choice they did not make. As much as they may want to be part of a family again, this new environment will feel foreign to them. But stepfamilies can survive, even thrive, as a result of planning, give-and-take, and most importantly, time.

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](#) 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.