

The City of Spokane

## Weekly News Update for Dec. 6

*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**

Engaging with and seeing City employees in action is especially rewarding. The commitment and compassion you show, especially this time of year, keeps people engaged in their community and enjoying the uniquely Spokane quality of life.

Typically, this space is committed to timely updates about current events. This week, the focus is on City teams and the services they are providing to keep our community supported and safe.

City Cable 5 captured several recent engagements of community impact. They range from the light-hearted and fun to ways to engage with the City to more serious matters. A few examples:

- Spokane Parks and Recreation staff is putting on its [second annual holiday market at the Riverfront Pavilion](#), a meet-up for local businesses and holiday enthusiasts and shoppers.
- The Office of Neighborhood Services is [producing news you can use](#), including history about Cannon Hill Park, holiday activities, and snow season information.
- The Spokane Police Department is partnering with community members and organizations to [purchase new bikes for kids in need](#) and the New Tech Skills Center to assemble them, [tracking down porch pirates](#) using social media, providing timely [tips to avoid vehicle theft](#), and solving a murder that devastated a family and community [more than 60 years ago](#).
- The Spokane Fire Department Fire is sharing a series of prevention information, including this video on [when to change the batteries in your smoke detector or replace the unit itself](#).
- Neighborhoods, Housing, and Human Services is partnering with Volunteers of America to [open a new Young Adult Shelter](#) near Spokane Community College to better direct resources that meet a specialized need and create additional space in the regional system.
- The City is promoting community engagement, seeking applicants for [various volunteer board and commissions](#) and [introducing the community to local businesses](#) as part of Small Business Month.

- And, finally, Spokane Public Libraries is [opening new branches](#), the most recent in the East Central neighborhood as a partnership between Parks and Libraries.

Each of these takes the time and talents of City employees to execute. Thank you for all that you do for our community.

## **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](mailto: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:**

- Neither Employee Benefits nor Payroll are 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 Jan. 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](#).

## **More Information to Assist You**

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

- [Navigate Stress this Season with a Holiday Roadmap](#)  
'Tis the season for family get-togethers and Hallmark family movies, but for many employees the holiday season can be the most difficult time of the year. [Click here](#) for tips on developing a healthy, holiday roadmap.
- [When You're Not Going Home for the Holidays](#)  
No matter how you choose to spend the holidays, you have control over how you respond to your emotions. Don't be afraid to reach out for support and talk about how you are dealing with the stress of the season. Remember, everything changes, including where and with whom you celebrate. Don't be afraid of celebrating in a different way and embracing new possibilities.

## **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.