

# Montana State Government Return to Worksite Stage 1 Guidelines

## FEBRUARY 12, 2021

As we continue navigating the COVID-19 situation, the Gianforte administration is committed to providing a safe and productive work environment. Governor Gianforte updated his COVID-19 guidance today. The Governor and his staff are continuing to monitor and evaluate work situations and the impact of COVID-19 in Montana and remain flexible in addressing issues as they arise. Agency management and individual employees will be asked to ensure that health, safety, and cleaning protocols are followed at worksites as we continue working together to meet operational needs and to serve the citizens of Montana.

Throughout all stages of returning to state worksites, agency managers and employees should cooperatively address individual situations, such as personal and family health issues and childcare shortages. Remote work and other flexible work arrangements are encouraged to continue to meet business needs and the personal needs of employees. Agencies should be flexible with onsite working conditions, such as allowing individuals to sit at different workstations to ensure distancing guidelines are met when employees return to worksites.

### COVID-Related Leave Time

The paid leave that was provided by federal law expired December 31, 2020. Effective January 1, 2021, federal law allows, but does not require, employers to extend paid sick leave and emergency family and medical paid leave to employees through March 2021. You may continue to use the FFCRA leave provided by the federal law and the original 80 hours of paid COVID sick leave provided by the State if you have not already exhausted the leave. No additional paid leave is available if you have already used the FFCRA and state-provided COVID-19 paid leave. Please review the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act Policy](#) and the corresponding [FAQs](#) for more information about paid leave for absences from work due to COVID-19.

Please note: not all of the requirements in the document apply to 24/7 facilities, such as the men's and women's prisons, other correctional facilities, the Vets' Home, the State Hospital, other DPHHS facilities, and employees working in some occupations that have close contact with citizens, such as social workers and probation and parole officers. Employees working in these facilities or occupations should follow direction provided by their agencies' management.

When the Governor's Office determines it is appropriate, employees will be notified to return to their assigned work locations in stages.

**Agencies and employees are expected to follow the Return to Worksite Stage 1 guidelines regarding employees' work locations as indicated below:**

- 1. Employees who can effectively work remotely should continue to do so. Refer to the previously issued [Emergency Onsite and Remote Work Procedures document](#) for additional guidance about managing remote work.**
- 2. Employees whose job responsibilities are necessary for agencies to effectively operate public-facing offices will return to their regular worksites.**
- 3. Employees whose job responsibilities include field work, for example appraisers and inspectors, may be asked to resume their job duties.**
- 4. Employees who cannot work remotely because their job duties do not allow for remote work should continue to report to their regular work locations.**

**This document addresses specific guidelines for our initial stage of return to state worksites. The Governor's Office continues to monitor the COVID-19 situation and will provide subsequent return-to-worksite guidelines when future stages of return are ready to be implemented.**

### **Return to Worksites Stage 1**

- During Stage 1, employees working in public-facing offices should continue reporting to work at their assigned worksites as determined by agency management to effectively provide services to citizens. Examples of public-facing offices include Fish, Wildlife, and Parks licensing offices, Department of Health and Human Services Offices of Public Assistance, Department of Labor Job Service offices, and other state offices that require regular, in-person interaction with the public.
- It may not be necessary for all employees working in a public-facing office to return to the office to provide necessary services. Agency management should consider the specific needs of the office and consider required social-distancing practices when determining how to staff an office.
- Agencies and employees must continue to follow a variety of social-distancing and other protocols discussed in the following sections of this document.

Flexible work schedules are encouraged to ensure business-operation needs are met while accommodating as much as possible employees' personal needs. For example, as a full-time employee, you could work remotely from 7 to 9:30 a.m., provide schooling or childcare until 1 p.m., work from 1 to 2:30 p.m., not work from 2:30 to 4 p.m., and then work remotely from 4 to 8 p.m. to fulfill your regular 8-hour work shift.

### **General Social-Distancing Guidelines**

Agencies and employees must follow recommended social-distancing guidelines, including:

- Staying six feet away from others as a normal practice.
- Eliminating physical contact with others, such as handshakes or embracing coworkers or visitors.
- Avoiding touching surfaces that are touched by others as much as possible.
- Avoiding anyone who appears to be sick or who is coughing or sneezing.

### **Workstations**

Whenever possible, workstations in common workspaces should be separated by at least six feet. When it is not possible to maintain physical separation, consider split shifts, flex schedules, or physical barriers to separate employees. The General Services Division can assist with obtaining and installing plexiglass barriers.

### **Self-Screening**

Before returning to work and before reporting to work for each shift, employees should self-screen for illness. Employees should refer to [this checklist](#) each time they plan work at a state work location. If an employee selects yes for any of the questions on the checklist, the employee should not go to the worksite. Instead, the employee should contact the employee's supervisor and stay home. Employees experiencing symptoms should contact their healthcare providers for further guidance. Additional information can be found at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

Agency managers can send employees home if they are exhibiting signs of illness while at work. Employees who have not exhausted available COVID-19 sick leave are eligible to use this leave when sent home from work because of exhibiting signs of illness. Employees who have exhausted available COVID-19 sick leave would be required to use other available leave, such as sick leave, accrued comp time, annual leave, or unpaid leave.

## Face Masks

Employees working in public-facing roles must continue to wear face masks at work. Employees who are working in the office, but who do not work in public-facing roles or in the areas open to the public, must wear face masks when in meetings with others and when in common areas. Employees do not have to wear masks when alone in their private offices.

A face covering that covers the mouth and nose is required in all common areas and shall be worn by state employees, contractors, and visitors in state owned or state leased facilities. Common areas include but are not limited to hallways, stairwells, breakrooms, and restrooms.

For any organized outdoor activity where social distancing is not observed, a face covering that covers the mouth and nose is required.

Agencies with public-facing offices should continue to post signage indicating individuals aged five and over must wear a mask while inside state owned or leased facilities. Approved signage for work areas can be found [here](#).

Employees who cannot wear a mask for medical reasons should contact their agency's HR department. Employees may be required to provide medical documentation indicating they are unable to wear face masks.

Follow [these CDC guidelines](#) for use and cleaning of face masks.

## Higher-Risk Employees

Employees who are at a higher risk for severe illness because of COVID-19 (such as individuals 65 years of age and older and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions) should continue to work remotely if possible.

If not possible, additional precautions should be taken to limit exposure to other individuals within the work environment. Considerations such as providing a workstation that is away from other coworkers and public locations, flexible work shifts outside of the regular business hours, and combined remote work and in-office time can be effective options to help minimize these employees' exposure to others.

Employees who have concerns about underlying health conditions and risk should discuss their concerns with their healthcare providers and work with their agency HR staff to address concerns.

If applicable, managers and human resources staff should ensure the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) interactive process is followed. These employees may also be eligible for paid leave under the FFCRA. See the [previously issued guidance](#) for more information about this paid leave.

## Meetings

Meetings should continue to be held online or by phone. When it is necessary to meet in person, employees are required to wear masks and social-distancing guidelines should be followed. Employees shall wear masks when interacting with each other or with members of the public.

## Travel

Out-of-state business travel is not permitted unless approved by the Governor's Chief of Staff. In-state business travel is permitted only when approved by an agency director or agency head. If it is necessary

to travel by car, employees should try to travel alone in vehicles when possible. If social distancing guidelines cannot be strictly followed, employees shall wear masks when traveling with others.

### **Visitors to State Worksites**

Visitors are not permitted in state offices and worksites unless approved by agency management. Meetings with non-employees should continue to be held virtually whenever possible.

### **Illness Prevention**

To ensure we continue to reduce the spread of COVID-19, we must continue these practices:

- Stay home if sick, except to get medical care.
- Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from all other persons.
- Understand that no one with [symptoms](#) should be present at the workplace. Employees should leave the workplace and inform their supervisor if they or their colleagues develop symptoms at work, especially [fever, cough, or shortness of breath](#).
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing noses, [coughing, or sneezing](#), or having been in a public place.
- Use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth.
- To the extent possible, avoid touching high-touch surfaces in public places – elevator buttons, door handles, handrails, handshaking with people, etc.
- Minimize handling cash, credit cards, and mobile or electronic devices when possible.
- Avoid all non-essential travel.

### **Cleaning and Disinfecting**

- Agency management is responsible for providing appropriate cleaning and disinfecting supplies and making them readily available to employees. Employees are responsible for regularly cleaning and disinfecting their personal work areas, computers and computer keyboards, and phones. Employees should appropriately clean shared areas, such as meeting rooms, kitchens, and coffee stations after each use.
- Surfaces frequently touched by multiple people, such as door handles, desks, phones, light switches, and faucets, should be cleaned and disinfected at least daily. More frequent cleaning and disinfection may be required based on level of use.
- The Department of Administration's General Services Division (GSD) can assist agencies with obtaining cleaning and disinfecting supplies. A limited number of supplies may be available directly through GSD. GSD will work with agency procurement officers to ensure that agencies have access to needed supplies.
- For additional information about cleaning and disinfecting worksites, review [guidance from the CDC](#).