



MONTANA STATE GOVERNMENT RETURN TO WORKSITES

STAGE THREE

UPDATED ON OCTOBER 13, 2021

The Gianforte administration is committed to providing a safe and productive work environment. The administration continues to monitor workplace operations and remains flexible in addressing issues as they arise. Agency management and individual employees are asked to continue working together to meet operational needs and to serve the citizens of Montana.

We are moving to stage three of the return worksite plan. **Employees must return to their pre-COVID-19 worksites by September 7, 2021.** Agency managers and employees should cooperatively address individual situations.

The guidelines below are effective October 13, 2021 and apply until further notice.

Please note: *Some of the requirements in this document may not apply to all employees, such as employees working at 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.*

VACCINATIONS

The Gianforte administration strongly recommends employees receive a [COVID-19 vaccine](#). COVID-19 vaccines greatly reduce the risk of serious illness or death and protect the people around you.

The best way to be protected from COVID-19 is to receive one of the safe and effective vaccines available now. COVID-19 vaccines were evaluated in tens of thousands of participants in clinical trials. The vaccines meet the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) rigorous scientific standards for safety, effectiveness, and manufacturing quality needed to support emergency-use authorization.

COVID-19 vaccines are available at local pharmacies, medical facilities, health departments, Montana Health Centers, and providers' offices. Go to [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find vaccines available near you.

The State of Montana Benefit Plan (State Plan) provides coverage for the vaccine without cost to members. If you have questions about vaccine coverage, contact Health Care & Benefits Division at (800) 287-8266 or benefitsquestions@mt.gov.

Because paid COVID-19 leave expired on September 30, employees may no longer use paid COVID-19 leave for absences from work related to obtaining a COVID-19 vaccine or for vaccine-related side effects. However, employees may use accrued sick leave, annual leave, or comp time leave for vaccine-related absences.

CLOSE CONTACT GUIDANCE

Close contact is defined as interaction within six feet for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period with someone who has COVID-19. If an employee has been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, the employee should follow local health department guidance. Local health department guidance may include recommendations to quarantine, to test for COVID-19, or to wear a mask when interacting with others. A department, with the approval of the Department of Administration,

may add additional protocols or mitigation measures as appropriate.

An employee identified as a close contact with someone who has COVID-19, even if the employee has no symptoms, must:

1. stay out of the office for at least the next three calendar days and work remotely if management determines that job duties allow and if the employee is well enough to work.
2. get tested immediately following exposure; and then again 3-5 days after exposure or immediately if symptoms develop. An employee should contact the agency HR staff about the availability of COVID-19 rapid tests at the agency's worksites.

Employees should also wear a mask indoors, where social distancing cannot be maintained, for 14 days after the last exposure to the infected individual.

If they choose to do so, employees whose job duties *do not* allow for remote work must be allowed to stay home from work for three calendar days and use accrued sick, annual, or comp time leave while absent from work.

Employees should consult with their human resources staff to determine if the FMLA or ADA applies when addressing concerns related to COVID-19. Employees with a qualifying health condition under the ADA should consult with their supervisor and HR representative to discuss accommodation options.

Employees who do not follow the direction in this document may be disciplined.

FACE MASKS

Employees may choose to wear face masks at work, but face masks are not required. Employees should wear face masks as described above in the close contact protocol.

At the discretion of agency management **and** the Department of Administration, employees working at certain agencies may still be required to wear face masks because of the nature of their work; specifically, employees working at the men's and women's prisons, other correctional facilities, the Vets' Home, the State Hospital, and other DPHHS facilities. This requirement may also apply to employees working in some occupations that have close contact with citizens, such as social workers and probation and parole officers.

Agency management must receive approval from the Department of Administration prior to implementing additional face mask requirements.

HIGHER-RISK EMPLOYEES

Employees who have concerns about underlying health conditions and COVID-19 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.

TELEWORK

No new telework agreements will be granted at this time. With management approval, employees who had pre-pandemic telework agreements may return to the schedules allowed in those agreements.

COVID-RELATED LEAVE TIME

The paid leave that was provided by federal law expired on September 30, 2021. Beginning October 1, 2021, employees must use their own available leave, such as sick leave, annual leave, accrued comp time, or unpaid leave, when absent from work because of COVID-19.

SELF-SCREENING

Before returning to the worksite and before reporting to work for each shift, employees should self-screen for illness.

Employees should refer to this [checklist](#) each day prior to reporting to their state worksite. 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.

MEETINGS

Meetings can be held in person, but agencies must provide virtual options for those with health concerns or others not comfortable with in-person meetings.

When determining whether to hold a virtual or in-person meeting, agency management should strongly consider which option will more effectively support business objectives and promote a healthy and safe work environment. Agencies hosting meetings or events with more than 25 people should consider implementing a symptom screening protocol for onsite attendees and must ensure that COVID-19 tests, masks, hand sanitizer, and social distancing options are available to all attendees at their request.

TRAVEL

No COVID-19 restrictions are in place for in-state travel. Agencies should follow their normal procedures for in-state travel approval.

Out-of-state business travel must be approved by an agency director or designee. Directors should consider the necessity of the travel and the location to where an employee is traveling when allowing out-of-state travel. Travel to areas where there is a high prevalence of COVID-19 infection is not recommended. For more information about COVID-19 infections in a particular location, see the [CDC's COVID Data Tracker](#).

VISITORS TO STATE WORKSITES

Visitors and non-employees are permitted in state buildings and at state worksites.

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) is available to provide guidance on best practices and use of cleaning and disinfecting products. Email [GSD Service Desk](#) or call (406) 444-3060 for assistance. For additional information about cleaning and disinfecting worksites, review [guidance from the CDC](#).