

*Revised FAQ released March 20, 2020, at 5 p.m. (Mountain Time).*

Fellow employees,

As the State of Montana prepares for potential impacts of coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, Executive Branch employees (including short-term workers and student interns) are encouraged to review the following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

Questions or concerns should be discussed with your supervisor in consultation with your agency's human resources staff.

This guidance is provided given the circumstances relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and is not applicable to any past events and does not create an expectation that these guidelines will continue beyond the COVID-19 situation.

This guidance will be updated as this situation continues to evolve. For instance, if the state determines that non-essential workers should transition to work remotely. Your supervisor will keep you informed as we move forward. Our priority is the health and safety of our employees and continuity of the critical services we provide.

**1. What is coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

**2. I am worried about being exposed to COVID-19 at work. How can I reduce my risk?**

Employees are always encouraged to use general precautions (at work, in public, or at home). Precautions include:

- Wash your hands with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds each time.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Refrain from reusing tissues after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched (cell phones, desk phones, keyboards, remote controls, countertops, refrigerator, door handles, etc.).
- Stay home from work if you are sick.
- Minimize your direct contact with others who may be unwell or who are vulnerable to illness.
- Get your flu vaccine if you have not already done so.

**3. What if I or a member of my household have a compromised immune system, how can I limit my exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace?**

If you or a member of your household are experiencing a compromised immune system and are concerned about possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace, contact your immediate supervisor. You may be required to provide a letter from your health care provider. If possible and appropriate for your work, arrangements may be made for you to be able to

work remotely (telework). Your supervisor and you can work together to make necessary arrangements so that you may work remotely.

If you are unable to work remotely because your work does not align with telework, you will be eligible for Paid COVID-19 Leave for up to 14 calendar days. After 14 calendar days, you can use accrued sick leave. You may also use accrued annual leave or compensatory time if you need to remain absent from work due to your personal health condition. If you must remain out from work after exhausting your available leave, you will be placed in an unpaid status until you have been released to return to work by your healthcare provider.

**4. What should I do if I think I am sick, but I don't know if I have been exposed to COVID-19?**

If you have symptoms of fever and cough or shortness of breath and have not had any known exposure to or tested positive for COVID-19, you should contact your health care provider for further guidance.

**5. What should I do if I have been exposed to COVID-19 but do not have symptoms associated with the virus?**

If you have reason to believe you have been exposed to the virus, you should contact your health care provider or your local health department. Notify your supervisor that you have taken this step. Employees may be required to remain under quarantine due to exposure to COVID-19 even if they are not symptomatic. If you are told by a health care provider or public health official that you should be under quarantine due to potential exposure, you should not report to work and will be eligible for Paid COVID-19 Leave for up to 14 calendar days. Under these circumstances, you will be required to provide a letter from your health care provider or local health department indicating that you have completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period. You may also be required to provide medical documentation releasing you to full duty prior to returning to work.

If possible and appropriate for your work, you may also arrange to work remotely (telework). You may work with your supervisor to make necessary arrangements so that you may work remotely.

**6. What should I do if I have been exposed to COVID-19 and believe I am developing symptoms associated with the virus?**

If you think you are developing symptoms associated with COVID-19 and have reason to believe you have been exposed to the virus, you should contact your health care provider or local health department. Notify your supervisor that you have taken this step. If you are told by a health care provider or public health official that you should be under isolation due to COVID-19 illness, you should not report to work and will be eligible for Paid COVID-19 Leave for up to 30 calendar days. You will be required to provide a letter from your health care provider or local health department indicating that you have completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period. You may also be required to provide medical documentation releasing you to full duty prior to returning to work.

**7. Will my insurance cover the cost of COVID-19 testing?**

The State Health insurance plan will cover COVID-19 testing and will waive co-pays, deductibles, and co-insurance for plan members when services are received from participating providers.

**8. I am concerned about exposure from a coworker who seems sick. Can I insist that they be sent home?**

If you have a concern about an employee who appears to be sick, speak to your supervisor. Agency management, in consultation with the agency's human resources office, will make appropriate decisions regarding whether the employee will report to work.

**9. Will I be notified if someone I work with is confirmed to have COVID-19?**

Employees known to be exposed to an individual diagnosed with COVID-19 will be notified that a case has been confirmed, but the Americans with Disabilities Act protects the identity and medical information of people with communicable diseases.

**10. Should I cancel planned business travel?**

Out-of-state travel must be approved as essential by the Governor's Office, Chief of Staff. In-state travel must be approved by your supervisor.

**11. What will happen if I have personal travel plans?**

You should discuss your personal travel plans with your supervisor. If you can postpone your personal travel plans to avoid exposure to COVID-19, that may be in your best interest as well as your coworkers' best interests. If you do travel, plan to contact your supervisor prior to returning to your workplace. Based on the situation in your workplace, you may be required to work remotely for up to 14 calendar days. If you are unable to work remotely and it is your supervisor's decision to have you remain away from the work environment for 14 calendar days, you will be eligible for Paid COVID-19 Leave.

**12. What additional precautions can a State agency take for employees dealing with the public?**

Agencies may consider the following precautions:

- Restrict how close the public may come to employees.
- Educate employees to wash hands often and use alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently.
- Institute hygiene rules for meetings, e.g., no handshakes.
- Maintain separate pens and other equipment for the public.

**13. What options are available for State employees who may need to be absent from work as a result of illness from or exposure to COVID-19?**

Telecommuting

The option to work from home (telecommute) for employees who need to be absent from work due to COVID-19 may depend on several factors including, but not limited to: job function, essential status, operational requirements of the agency, and ability to access required technology. You should seek approval from your supervisor if this is an option for you.

Leave Options

The State may provide up to 30 calendar days of Paid COVID-19 Leave for employees who are diagnosed with COVID-19. You will be required to provide written documentation from your health care provider or a public health official of the requirement to be absent from work.

You will also be required to provide a letter from your healthcare provider or local health department indicating that you have completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period as well as provide medical documentation releasing you to full duty prior to returning to work.

**14. Am I entitled to use Family and Medical Leave (FMLA) for COVID-19?**

You may be entitled to use FMLA for absence related to COVID-19 if you have a qualifying event as defined by the Family and Medical Leave Act. Your agency human resources staff can assist you with questions related to FMLA eligibility.

**15. What should I do if I have a delayed return from personal travel?**

If you have a delayed return from personal travel as a result of any state's or country's monitoring or management of COVID-19 or transportation disruptions associated with such monitoring or management, you should contact your supervisor. State employees may be eligible to use available accrued leave to cover the absence.

**16. What if I need to miss work due to an immediate family member requiring quarantine as a result of COVID-19?**

You may be eligible for up to 14 calendar days of Paid COVID-19 Leave to care for a member of your immediate family who is quarantined or is ill as a result of COVID-19. You will be required to provide a letter from your healthcare provider or local health department indicating that your immediate family member has completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period.

State employees who need to be absent for more than 14 calendar days for this purpose may use available leave as outlined in the annual, compensatory time, and sick-leave policies.

**17. What if I need to miss work due to a school, dependent care, or eldercare facility closure due to a COVID-19 outbreak?**

If you need to stay home to care for a child because of a school closure, you may be eligible to work remotely (telework). You may work with your supervisor to make necessary arrangements so that you may work remotely.

If you are required to stay home due to closure of a school, childcare, or eldercare facility in connection with the monitoring or management of the coronavirus or as a result of a declared public health emergency by the Governor and you are not eligible to work remotely or are unable to telework because your child needs full-time care, you are eligible for up to 80 hours of **Paid COVID-19 Leave**. This paid leave is prorated for part-time employees. This paid leave can be taken intermittently and is available effective March 16, 2020; this paid leave will not deduct from accrued leave balances. After having used up to 80 hours of Paid COVID-19 Leave, you may use accrued annual (vacation), compensatory (comp) time, or sick leave.

**18. Where will notifications of State office closures or other announcements for State employees be posted?**

Notifications will be posted on the following websites:

[www.hr.mt.gov](http://www.hr.mt.gov)

For other questions not covered in the Frequently Asked Questions, please contact your agency human resources office.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- Paid COVID-19 Leave is only available for your actual worked hours as scheduled by your immediate supervisor. Paid COVID-19 Leave is not provided during weekend or workdays when you are not scheduled to work, and no work has been performed.

Thank you,

Sincerely, Director John Lewis

*Adapted from the State of Delaware Department of Human Resources and State of Washington COVID-19 guidance documents.*

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