

This FAQ was developed to assist Spokane County employees and managers in preparing for and responding to workplace issues arising from COVID-19.

Each Spokane County Department Head/Elected Official should have a continuity of operations plan, noting essential business functions and respective staffing requirements. As with any emergency situation, departments must be prepared to respond to potential increased absenteeism and implement plans to continue essential business functions. Departments are encouraged to:

- Cross-train employees to perform essential functions, enabling an office/department to operate even if key staff members are absent or otherwise unable to perform their duties.
- Assess essential department functions and reliance others and the community have on departmental services. Be prepared to change business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize customers, temporarily suspend some non-essential operations if needed.)
- Consider altered staffing plans to provide service on a reduced level, such as staggering staffing (e.g. With a work group of 15 employees, only 5 employees report to the workplace each day, with the remaining 10 employees telecommuting. Each employee physically works in the office every third day to promote social distancing, while maintaining a staffed office.) There are many options for flexible staffing; managers must determine which works best for their individual work group and department function(s).

Congress recently passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which will provide relief for employees forced to miss work because of the COVID-19 outbreak. This new law includes an emergency expansion of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and a new federal paid sick leave law. Spokane County is currently developing policy and procedures surrounding the implementation of the FFCRA, effective April 2, 2020.

It is important to note this is a constantly evolving issue; we will continue to update you with new developments/impacts as they occur.

1. What is COVID-19/Coronavirus?

Coronavirus disease 2019, or COVID-19, is a disease caused by a coronavirus- a large family of viruses often associated with mild respiratory illnesses such as the common cold. It can affect your upper respiratory tract (sinuses, nose, and throat) or lower respiratory tract (windpipe and lungs). Most coronaviruses aren't dangerous, but some have caused more severe illness- such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

In early 2020, following a December 2019 outbreak, the World Health Organization identified a new type of coronavirus. Officials named this new virus severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). This is the virus that causes COVID-19; infections range from mild to serious.

2. What are common symptoms of COVID-19 illness?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Most people with COVID-19 will have mild disease but some will experience more severe symptoms. The CDC believes symptoms appear 2 to 14 days after a person is exposed to the virus. COVID-19 is new, and we are learning more each day about symptoms it causes and how long it takes for people to become sick.

Which populations are at increased risk of experiencing adverse health complications?

Although there are health risks for anyone contracting the virus, certain populations have been identified as having an increased risk of experiencing more severe symptoms. These include:

- Adults over 60 years old
- Individuals with chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, lung disease or other conditions resulting in a compromised immune system
- Individuals who are pregnant

People at higher risk of severe illness should stay home and away from large groups of people as much as possible. Employees who meet these criteria should work with their supervisors and with Human Resources to address their concerns.

3. How does the virus spread?

COVID-19 can spread between people who are in close contact with one another (within 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. A person may also be exposed to COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes; according to the CDC, this is likely not the primary way the virus spreads.

Often, as with most respiratory viruses, people are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest) but there is some indication of COVID-19 spread by individuals who are not exhibiting typical symptoms. For this reason, it is imperative we all do our part to minimize the spread of the virus by practicing social distancing. _____

4. **How can Spokane County staff minimize the spread COVID-19?**

Spokane County employees can minimize the spread of viruses, including COVID-19, by taking the following actions at work and at home. The Spokane Regional Health District advises these measures:

- Wash your hands often- and thoroughly- with soap and water
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, or the inside of your elbow
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home when you are sick
- Practice social distancing (stay at least 6 feet away from others)

Can employees be required to utilize personal protection equipment (PPE) (gloves, masks, etc.) while at work?

Personal protective equipment can be required AFTER a hazard assessment has been conducted and documented by Risk Management; Loss Control Specialists generally conduct these assessments upon request as part of their liaison responsibilities.

If employees will be required to use of this type of equipment, managers need to refer to the Accident Prevention Program (Section 1.3 Personal Protective Equipment Program) as well as WAC 296-800-160 and then contact the assigned Loss Control Specialist to ensure an assessment is completed correctly and all issues are addressed prior to mandating PPE for employees.

There are potential medical requirements and implications related to the selection of PPE (glove material, respirators, etc.), and these issues must be resolved up front. PPE may be provided for “Voluntary” use until the required assessment process can be completed.

Additionally, the CDC has offered the following guidance with regard to the use of face masks: "Face masks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others," the CDC notes. "The use of face masks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings [at home or in a health care facility]." To stay clear of the virus and the disease it causes, the CDC recommends healthy people practice careful hand-washing, avoid close contact with people who are sick, clean frequently used surfaces and—perhaps hardest of all—refrain from touching their faces.

5. **Who should seek medical evaluation for COVID-19?**

Employees should contact their medical provider if they are experiencing symptoms, have travelled to a highly affected area or have had recent close contact with someone who has been diagnosed or is being evaluated for COVID-19 infection. To mitigate the chance of further spread, medical providers are encouraging telephone or on-line contact for evaluation (vs. visiting an urgent care location.) Please follow the direction of your provider.

6. **Can an employee exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms be required to go home?**

Yes. Employees are encouraged to stay home if they are experiencing respiratory symptoms- especially fever, cough or shortness of

breath- and to remain at home until they are symptom free for 72 hours (employees should consult their healthcare professional for specific guidance). If an employee arrives at work with symptoms or develops symptoms while at work they will be advised to go home. If the employee refuses, managers may require the employee to go home and not return to work until they are symptom-free (without the use of medication) for at least 72 hours. If questions arise surrounding this issue, contact Human Resources.

People are known to be contagious at the onset of symptoms. It is critical an employee experiencing symptoms stay home for a medically recommended period and only return to work when they are symptom free for a prescribed amount of time (unless advised otherwise by their medical provider).

If an employee has had a fever with cough or shortness of breath but has not been exposed to someone with COVID-19 and has not tested positive for COVID-19 themselves, they should stay home until they no longer have a fever for 72 hours and other symptoms resolve.

Telecommuting is not a viable option while an employee is sick, as the focus should be on the employee's health and recovery.

Employees should reference the attached "Pay Options During COVID-19 Pandemic" document to understand available options for remaining in paid status under this circumstance. If the employee elects to use accrued leave balances, the employee must indicate to their supervisor or payroll clerk which leave bank they wish to use.

7. Can an employee who indicates they may have been exposed to the virus be required to go home?

For the employee who believes they may have been exposed to the virus, but is not experiencing symptoms: simply being "exposed" to the illness may or may not require an employee to quarantine. If the employee, out of an abundance of caution, requests to self-quarantine, the manager will discuss the situation and available options. If the employee does not necessarily want to self-quarantine and has no symptoms, the manager should consider many factors, including the level of exposure (e.g. if a member of the employee's immediate family tests positive and they are caring for them) (see guidance under FAQ #8). If the employee was simply at an event with someone that was exposed, quarantine may not be a necessary solution. Managers and employees should review this on a case by case basis. If telecommuting is an option for the employee's position, the manager should discuss implementing that option for the employee.

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8. What if a member of an employee's household is sick. Can the employee be sent home as a precautionary quarantine?

If a member of an employee's immediate household is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, the employee is advised to self-quarantine. If the employee does not wish to quarantine as a precautionary measure, they will be directed to isolate from the workforce and contact their medical provider for guidance. The employee's medical provider will go through an assessment with the employee and will make a determination as to whether their presence in the workplace poses a potential risk. If it is determined there is a risk, the employee will

be sent home. Employees should reference the attached “Pay Options During COVID-19 Pandemic” document to understand available options for remaining in paid status under this circumstance. If the employee elects to use accrued leave balances, the employee must indicate to their supervisor or payroll clerk which leave bank they wish to use.

If the ill family member tests positive for COVID-19, the leave/telecommute period will begin immediately for 14-days. If the employee becomes symptomatic or sick during the 14-day period, they must remain out of the workplace until at least 72 hours have passed since last experiencing a fever (without the use of fever-reducing medications), respiratory symptoms have improved AND at least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

If the employee shows no signs or symptoms after the 14-day period, the employee will be allowed to return to the workplace with the caveat they monitor their status and remove themselves immediately if they become symptomatic. Due to the anticipated difficulty in attaining a doctor’s note to return to work, the employee will not be required to produce a written release unless required to do so by Human Resources. This requirement is waived with the understanding each employee will have communicated with their medical professional regarding their health status and received confirmation of their ability to safely return to the workplace.

9. What if an employee is considered high-risk, and does not want to come to work for fear of contracting COVID-19?

If an employee has a medical condition that compromises their immune system in such a way that exposure to a virus may create a “direct threat” of harm to the employee, it may be necessary to engage in the interactive process under the ADA to determine the nature of the employee’s medical status and need for accommodation. Employees in this situation may be able to telecommute, if the nature of their work allows for it. Based on the outcome of the ADA process the County will determine the appropriate accommodation for the employee. Employees in this situation need to contact their supervisor immediately so the ADA process through Human Resources may be initiated.

What if the employee elects to stay out of the workforce vs. explore possible accommodations?

Employees should reference the attached “Pay Options During COVID-19 Pandemic” document to understand available options for remaining in paid status under this circumstance. If the employee elects to use accrued leave balances, the employee must indicate to their supervisor or payroll clerk which leave bank they wish to use.

10. What if an employee is healthy but chooses to self-quarantine because a member of their household is considered high-risk or they are otherwise fearful of coming to work due to COVID-19?

Each department should identify critical operational needs and minimum staffing to meet those needs. Should an otherwise healthy employee wish to self-quarantine, they should discuss the circumstances and options with their supervisor. Employees should reference the attached “Pay Options During COVID-19 Pandemic” document to understand available options for remaining in paid status under this circumstance. If the employee elects to use accrued leave balances, the employee must indicate to their supervisor or payroll clerk which leave bank they wish to use.

11. If an employee is required to stay home due to illness (either voluntarily or involuntarily), must the employee be paid?

Employees should reference the attached “Pay Options During COVID-19 Pandemic” document to understand available options for remaining in paid status under this circumstance. If the employee elects to use accrued leave balances, the employee must indicate to their supervisor or payroll clerk which leave bank they wish to use.

If an employee is no longer symptomatic, but remains home on a self-quarantine they may be authorized to telecommute or work from home, if their work assignment allows for it.

12. How long can an employee remain in unpaid status?

Per County policy, an employee must use all available leave prior to going into unpaid status. The attached “Pay Options During COVID-19 Pandemic” illustrates the various pay options employees may have available. Depending on the situation, and if all available options have been exhausted, the employee may be placed in unpaid status. An unpaid leave of absence may be approved for up to 90 days. After 30 consecutive days leave of absence, the employee will be responsible for paying the entire cost of his/her medical insurance coverage and that of his/her dependents (through COBRA) for the remaining 60 days.

13. When can an employee who has tested positive for COVID-19 return to work?

If an employee has tested positive for COVID-19, they should remain under home isolation precautions under the following conditions:

- At least 72 hours since last experiencing a fever (without the use of fever-reducing medications) and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, etc.) AND
- At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

Individuals with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 who have not had any symptoms may discontinue home isolation when at least 7 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test and have had no subsequent illness.

Employees are not required to submit a note from their doctor to return to work, unless otherwise required by Human Resources.

14. Should employees be informed if one of their coworkers has been diagnosed with COVID-19?

If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, coworkers should be informed of their possible exposure- but under no circumstances is it appropriate to disclose an employee’s medical condition with anyone other than Risk Management and Human Resources.

Workplace rumors about an employee’s COVID-19 status should be addressed immediately by management. Just as it is not appropriate for management to discuss or disclose an employee’s medical condition, it is equally inappropriate for employees to speculate, discuss or otherwise gossip about a coworker’s medical condition or status.

Managers must be cautious not to directly or indirectly disclose the confidential medical information of an infected employee. Confidentiality provisions of the ADA may apply or there may be situations covered by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability

Act (HIPAA).

In notifying coworkers of their potential exposure, an example communication may include: "On [date] it came to management's attention that one of our employees has been infected with [virus or illness]; we are following recommended medical guidelines. We urge all employees to take precautions to minimize further spread of the virus, including monitoring yourself for symptoms, practicing good hygiene and going home/staying home if you are sick. If you show symptoms of the illness, you are not to come into the workplace and are advised to contact your medical provider for guidance."

15. If an employee is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or indicates a potential exposure, can the employee be required to produce a negative test result to remain (or return to) the workplace?

No. An employee cannot be required to test for COVID-19, or be asked if they have undergone testing. Employees can, however, be asked if they are currently experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19; action can be taken accordingly.

16. What if an employee must stay home to care for their child due to the closure of their school?

Employees should reference the attached "Pay Options During COVID-19 Pandemic" document to understand available options for remaining in paid status under this circumstance. If the employee elects to use accrued leave balances, the employee must indicate to their supervisor or payroll clerk which leave bank they wish to use.

17. Can an employee's work schedule be modified to accommodate temporary childcare needs, or to allow for social distancing measures?

Yes. We encourage departments to be flexible and creative in balancing employee needs with safety precautions and the need to conduct County business. If work schedules can be modified to accommodate childcare needs and/or to reduce the number of employees congregating in single locations, management should make the appropriate arrangements and notify the applicable bargaining unit, along with Human Resources.

18. How are telecommuting requests handled?

Each department should evaluate the ability of their employees to temporarily work from home, if the need arises. Not every position is conducive to working from home; an employee's ability to telecommute is dependent upon their job duties, available equipment, etc.

- i. **Jobs well suited for telecommuting** are jobs or tasks that require reading, writing, research, working with data and talking on the phone. In general, and at management's discretion, a job is suited to telecommuting if the job or some components can be done off-site without disruption to the flow of work and communication.
- ii. **Jobs not well suited for telecommuting** are jobs which require in-person contact/customer service or that rely upon specific equipment or supplies to work on site, or physical jobs that provide a 24/7 operational service. Management and/or supervisory roles are also generally excluded from consideration for telecommuting unless a department finds such an

arrangement practical in meeting job responsibilities. Some jobs that may not seem appropriate at first may be modified so that employees can telecommute. Contact your HR Generalist for assistance navigating unique circumstances.

Each employee must complete a telecommuting agreement (found on County Ideas page) and submit to their manager for approval; requests will be approved on a case by case basis, dependent upon the employee's ability to reasonably perform the essential functions of their position remotely. It is recommended telecommuting assignments are approved on a provisional basis, with the employee's understanding that as the departments needs change, their telecommuting assignment may be modified, reduced, or removed altogether. Completed agreements will be kept on file within each department.

Management will submit a help desk ticket through IT, requesting the approved employee be set up for remote PC access.

To telecommute successfully, work performance standards must be met by the employee. Managers should articulate clear procedures regarding check-in times and hours of availability. Expectations must be set to determine the desired work product, and it is recommended expectations be provided in writing. This is a critical aspect to ensure a successful telecommuting arrangement that ensures essential job functions are met. With proper planning, communication problems can be minimized.

Common telecommuting questions:

- **Can the County provide the necessary equipment or tools for an employee to work from home successfully?** For example, is a majority of the employee's work handling phone calls? If so, what telephone or call forwarding equipment will the employee need to be successful working from home? If the equipment needs cannot be reasonably accommodated (e.g. the employee does not have internet access at home, and their position requires remote access to their work PC), it may not be appropriate for that employee to work from home.
- **Can an employee work a schedule where some days they telecommute and others they report to the office?** Not all employees will be able to perform all essential job functions from home. A manager may want to consider if an employee could perform job functions *intermittently* from home. Managers do not have to authorize a full-time schedule of telecommuting each week; there can be stipulations that an employee report to the workplace on certain days or during certain hours to maintain performance of essential job functions while also allowing for social distancing precautions.
- **What happens with telecommuting employees following the COVID-19 outbreak:**
The current authorization for broad telecommuting is exclusive to this period of pandemic illness, and is not intended to set precedent. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, normal County operations will resume.

19. Will employees be eligible for Workers Compensation benefits if they contract COVID-19 while at work?

Governor Jay Inslee has allowed Workers Compensation coverage to include healthcare workers and first responders who are quarantined by a physician or public health officer after they have been exposed to COVID-19 on the job. At this time, only healthcare

workers and first responders are eligible.

20. What are some tools for social distancing at work?

Continuing County operations to the fullest extent possible is vital, but must be balanced with providing a safe working environment for employees. All employees are expected to adhere to social distancing protocol within the workplace. Managers should examine each employee's workspace to ensure appropriate distancing from worker to worker (> 6 feet), as well as an appropriate distance for customer service interactions. It may be helpful to place tape on the floor, designating a visual 6-foot boundary for interactions. Employees should participate in discussing various options for modifying their workspace and/or the larger office environment to promote social distancing and limiting face-to-face interactions.

Employees in departments having a high level of interaction with the public and/or money handling should take extra precautions to protect themselves.

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after nose blowing, coughing, sneezing, or having interactions with another individual.
 - If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- To the extent possible, avoid touching "high-touch" surfaces, including elevator buttons, door handles, handrails, handshaking, etc.
- Regularly clean and disinfect work area and counters.
- If possible, limit money handling to one employee, who is equipped with gloves*; encourage the use of online payment options, if available.
- If possible, limit customer interactions to one employee, who is equipped with gloves*.
 - *In providing gloves, reference the subsection under #4: Can employees be required to utilize personal protection equipment (PPE) (gloves, masks, etc.) while at work?

With regard to meetings, the following are recommendations to limit social interaction and exposure, while continuing the work of the County:

- Employees should to limit their physical attendance at meetings.
- Employees should consider and use their best judgement to determine whether meetings (including those internally amongst work groups) are necessary, if they can be held virtually, or if they can be postponed altogether as a non- immediate need at this time.
- In lieu of in-person meetings, the following tools are available to County employees:
 - i. Email: Appropriate for more direct or less complex matters that could be effectively resolved via a reasonable email communication exchange.
 - ii. Teleconference
 - iii. Skype Instant Messaging

- iv. Skype Video
- v. Zoom Video

21. What travel restrictions are in currently in place?

For updated information on personal travel restrictions, check the CDC Traveler's Health Notices for the latest guidance and recommendations: <https://www.cdc.gov>.

PAY OPTIONS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Require application process, either through County HR or WA State * Eligibility Requirements Vary Per Leave*							
	Telecommute (if available)	Use accrued leave balances	Federal Emergency Paid Sick (up to 80 hours) (effective 4/1/20)	Expanded Family & Medical Leave (up to 12 weeks) (effective 4/1/20)	WA State Paid FML (up to 12 weeks)	Unpaid Leave of Absence (up to 90 days)	Unemployment (up to 26 weeks)
Impact on pay	<i>Employee receives regular pay</i>	<i>Employee receives regular pay</i>	<i>Two tiers: pay dependent upon reason for leave.</i>	<i>First 2 weeks unpaid (may cover w/Federal Paid Sick); remaining 10 weeks @ 2/3 regular rate of pay, up to \$200/day maximum</i>	<i>As determined by State ESD</i>	<i>Unpaid leave</i>	<i>As determined by State ESD</i>
Impact on benefits	<i>Benefits remain status quo</i>	<i>Benefits remain status quo</i>	<i>Benefits remain status quo</i>	<i>Benefits remain status quo</i>	<i>Benefits remain status quo (ee portion billed)</i>	<i>Benefits remain status quo for 30 days, then COBRA</i>	<i>Benefits remain status quo for 90 days (ee portion billed)</i>
How to apply	<i>Discuss with supervisor</i>	<i>Discuss with supervisor</i>	<i>Human Resources</i>	<i>Human Resources</i>	<i>Employment Security Department</i>	<i>Discuss with supervisor</i>	<i>Employment Security Department</i>
I am mildly ill with COVID-19 symptoms		X	X		X		X
I am severely ill with COVID-19 symptoms		X	X		X	X	
I was contacted about exposure and quarantined	X	X	X				X
I am caring for sick family member		X	X		X		
School closure, no childcare	X	X	X	X		X	
I am immune-compromised and advised to quarantine	X	X	X				X
I am afraid of exposure; decline to come to work	X	X				X	
My dept. reduced available hours due to lack of work		X					X