



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Human Resources Frequently Asked Questions

Revised July 1, 2020

Note: *Health and Safety Leave* related to COVID-19 was discontinued as of **June 30, 2020**. If you have any questions about leave options related to COVID-19, please contact your agency's HR Liaison.

This document is intended to provide clarity about employee policies, practices and procedures that may be impacted in response to COVID-19 and its potential impact to operations. If you have questions that are not answered in this document, please direct them to the Office of Human Resources Management (ohrm@co.pg.md.us). The document will continue to evolve as we receive additional questions and as information progresses. Information is subject to change and the below guidelines are intended to be temporary as a safety precaution to COVID-19.

Commitment to Professional Workplace

Prince George's County Government is committed to maintaining a respectful and professional workplace. In light of the recent COVID-19 outbreak, all employees are expected to act with civility and integrity. As we move through this situation, these expectations and our values should be our guiding principles as we serve the public.

Commitment to Health and Safety

The safety of our community and our workforce is our highest priority. For up-to-date information on COVID-19, and guidance from the Health Department, visit health.mypgc.us/coronavirus.

Commitment to Equity

Misinformation about coronavirus can create fear and hostility that hurts people and makes it harder to keep everyone healthy. Ensuring our workforce is informed is critically important, given the current national trend of open xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment. Sadly, local incidents of bias, stigma, and hatred against people in communities of color have increased in conjunction with rising COVID-19 concerns.

Prince George's County is committed to providing employees with a workplace that is free of illegal bias, prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and retaliatory conduct. The County does not sanction any xenophobia driven by people's fears and anxieties about this virus. If you are experiencing any such behavior in your department, please notify your Appointing Authority or Department Director, who will work with the Office of Human Resources Management and other entities to address the issue.

A. About COVID-19

1. What is Coronavirus?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is caused by a respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. This is a new virus that hasn't caused illness in humans before.

2. What are the symptoms of Coronavirus?

Symptoms can include fever, coughing and shortness of breath.

3. When do symptoms appear?

The CDC believes symptoms will appear between two (2) and 14 days after exposure to the virus.

4. Will the County's healthcare vendors (Cigna and Kaiser Permanente) provide medically necessary testing for COVID-19?

Yes, the cost sharing (deductibles, copayments and coinsurance) will be reduced to zero dollars (\$0.00) for medically necessary screening and testing for COVID-19. If a member is diagnosed with COVID-19, all treatment including but not limited to hospital, transportation and pharmacy services will be covered in accordance with the terms and conditions set forth in the coverage document for the member's health plan.

5. What people are at high risk?

- Older adults;
- People with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, or lung disease.¹

People at higher risk of severe illness should stay home and away from large groups of people as much as possible, including public places with lots of people and large gatherings where there will be close contact with others. Employees who meet the criteria for being at a higher risk should work with their supervisors to address their concerns. The County encourages these employees to telecommute when possible. For those who cannot telecommute and elect to stay home, they may use accrued and donated leaves in the following order:

1. Sick leave
2. Vacation leave or compensatory time
3. Donated leave

6. What can be done to prevent the spread of the virus?

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay at home when sick.
- Cover cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in trash.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

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- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces with regular household cleaning spray.
- Frequently wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Be symptom free for 24 hours before returning to work.

For additional information, see the Health Department's website, health.mypgc.us/coronavirus.

7. Is COVID-19 a quarantinable communicable disease?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has determined that COVID-19 meets the definition for "severe acute respiratory syndromes." Therefore, this novel coronavirus is a "quarantinable communicable disease." Additional information on quarantinable communicable diseases is available from the CDC at <http://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/AboutLawsRegulationsQuarantinesolation.html>.

8. What can an employee do who is feeling anxious about the coronavirus?

Get accurate information from the CDC, www.cdc.gov/coronavirus, and/or the Prince George's County Health Department, health.mypgc.us/coronavirus. Employees may also contact the Employee Assistance Program, KEPRO, at 877-334-0530, or the Prince George's County Hotline, at 301-883-6627.

B. Employee Relations

DEFINITION

Health and Safety Leave

Administrative leave may be granted by the Chief Administrative Officer or designee for "hazardous working conditions which may prevent an employee from reporting to work or which may require early release from work. For the purposes of COVID-19 the leave will be called "Health and Safety Leave" and entered as in Kronos as ***Administrative Leave-Govt 1221***. Agencies have the authority to place an employee on excused absence (Health and Safety Leave) and order him or her to stay at home or away from the workplace. The duration of any such excused absence (Health and Safety Leave) is dependent on the specific circumstances but is typically a short period. Placing an employee on excused absence (Health and Safety Leave) is fully within an agency's discretion and does not require the consent or request of the employee. ***Agencies should not place an employee on excused absence (Health and Safety Leave) without first consulting with the Director of the Office of Human Resources Management and the County Attorney to review agency policy, collective bargaining agreements, and applicable law with respect to any applicable collective bargaining provisions.***

1. What happens if an employee comes to work with COVID-19 symptoms?

A. Addressing Employees with Symptoms

When a supervisor observes an employee at the workplace exhibiting medical symptoms, he or she can express general concern regarding the employee's health and remind the

employee of his or her leave options for seeking medical attention, such as requesting sick or annual leave. If, in the judgment of the employee's supervisor, the employee is too sick to remain in the workplace, the supervisor should send the employee home. Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g., cough suppressants).²

B. Employees Without Available Leave

If the employee has no leave available, Appointing Authorities are authorized to approve requests for advanced leave, donated leave or leave without pay in certain circumstances.

C. Telework-Eligible Employees

When these leave options are not practical, a viable alternative, when the employee is covered by a telework agreement, is for the employee to work from home for social distancing purposes pursuant to a situational telework arrangement approved by the employee's supervisor and Appointing Authority.

2. Who assesses employees and orders them home if they appear ill?

Appointing Authorities and/or Deputy Directors may require an employee to take leave or stay away from the worksite based on objective evidence only, not suspicion. Objective evidence will depend on the facts of each case and may consist of: (1) a statement from the health authorities having jurisdiction; or (2) from a health care provider that the employee is physically unable to work or poses a danger to other employees. Consultation with public health officials may be appropriate. Less definitive, but potentially sufficient, evidence would be the employee making specific comments about being exposed to pandemic influenza or to a quarantinable communicable disease such as COVID-19 (e.g., taking care of a sick relative or friend). If such comments are made, Appointing Authorities and/or Deputy Directors should consult with OHRM and the County Attorney's office to assess whether a determination from a public health official is appropriate and necessary.

OHRM and the Office of Law (OOL) should be contacted to determine the best course of action based on objective evidence. OHRM and the OOL have the necessary knowledge to assist Appointing Authorities and/or Deputy Directors and supervisors with options.

3. Can an agency mandate an employee exposed to or infected with COVID-19 to remain away from the workplace for a specified period?

Generally, an agency should not prohibit an employee from reporting to work unless it has evidence or a reasonable concern that an employee is physically unable to perform his or her job, or their presence in the workplace poses a risk of infection to others. Whenever possible, sick employees should be encouraged to take leave, such as sick leave, annual

² Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

leave, advanced leave, other paid time off (e.g., earned compensatory time off, personal leave), or leave without pay. Excused absence (Health and Safety Leave) may be used if other options are not feasible and it is necessary to prevent an employee from being at the worksite and possibly putting other employees at risk.

Appointing Authorities and/or Deputy Directors need to consult with OHRM and OOL when deciding to enforce the use of leave.

The Health Department will provide information related to the length of time an individual remains contagious, as well as current recommendations for social distancing, etc. For information specific to COVID-19, please view CDC's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>. In the case of an epidemic or pandemic, agency personnel actions aimed at preventing the spread of a disease may be taken because of the guidance or directive of public health officials regarding the general danger to public health.

4. Does an agency have the right to request medical documentation when the employee is requesting sick leave? May an agency require all staff to be tested and treated for a quarantinable communicable disease, such as COVID-19?

Agency policy and collective bargaining agreements may have provisions for requesting medical documentation from an employee. Accordingly, agencies should consult with the Office of Human Resources Management for guidance. An agency may grant sick leave only when supported by evidence administratively acceptable to the agency. For absences in excess of 3 days, or for a lesser period when determined necessary by the agency, an agency may require a medical certificate or other administratively acceptable evidence.

Under current rules, management may require medical evaluation or screening only when the need for such evaluation is supported by the nature of the work. Attempts on the part of a supervisor to assume a particular medical diagnosis based on observable symptoms is very problematic and should be avoided. However, when a supervisor observes an employee exhibiting symptoms of illness, he or she may express concern regarding the employee's health and remind the employee of his or her leave options for seeking medical attention, such as requesting sick or annual leave. If the employee has no leave available, Appointing Authorities are authorized to approve requests for advanced leave or leave without pay in certain circumstances as outlined in Personnel Law and Personnel Procedure 284. Agencies should also note the provisions of *Personnel Procedure 284*, which require the approval of requests for sick leave if an employee is determined by the health authorities having jurisdiction or by a health care provider, to "jeopardize the health of others by his or her presence on the job because of exposure to a communicable disease."

5. Under what circumstances should an agency communicate to its employees that there is a confirmed case among one or more of its employees (without identifying the person/specific office)?

The infected employee's privacy should be protected to the greatest extent possible; therefore, his or her identity should not be disclosed. In an outbreak of a quarantinable communicable disease or COVID-19, management should share only that information determined to be necessary to protect the health of the employees in the workplace, but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Appointing Authorities and/or Deputy Directors should consult with OHRM and OOL, who will consult the Department of Health to determine what information is releasable. Employees exposed to a coworker with confirmed COVID-19 should contact the Health Department at 301-583-3750 for risk assessment and consult their medical provider for guidance.

If social distancing, information sharing, or other precautions to assist employees in recognizing symptoms or reducing the spread of the illness can be taken without disclosing information related to a specific employee, that is the preferred approach.

Appointing Authorities and/or Deputy Directors should treat this as they would any other illness in the workplace and continue to protect employee privacy interests while providing sufficient information to all employees related to protecting themselves against the spread of illness.

6. What should an employee do if they have reasonable suspicion that they have been exposed to COVID-19?

Employees should notify their Appointing Authority and/or Deputy Director and should contact the Health Department at 301-583-3750 for risk assessment and consult their medical provider for guidance.

C. Telework

1. Who should telework?

Departments should maximize telework. At this time, departments should assess all employees' eligibility to telework and have signed telework agreements as soon as possible for all telework-eligible employees. The County has relaxed restrictions about having a child at home while telecommuting, but the expectation of productive work remains. This could include increased telecommuting days, planning for employees to be onsite at different times rather than all at once, scheduling virtual meetings, and talking with your employees about what ideas they have. Make sure those who are telecommuting are available and responsive. Work with your teams to make sure your employees are ready to telecommute for long

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periods. You may review the Personnel Procedure 226, Telework Program online at <https://tinyurl.com/PGCHRTelework>.

2. Generally, how should agencies manage telework during incidences of quarantinable communicable disease, such as COVID-19?

For an employee covered by a telework agreement, situational telework arrangements can be used as a flexibility to promote social distancing and can be an alternative to the use of sick leave for exposure to a quarantinable communicable disease for an employee who is asymptomatic or caring for a family member who is asymptomatic. An employee's request to telework from home while responsible for such a family member may be approved for the length of time the employee is free from care duties and has work to perform to effectively contribute to the agency's mission. Agencies should have written telework agreements in place with as many employees who are willing to participate and communicate expectations for telework in emergency situations.

3. Does an agency possess the authority to have their telework program participants work from home during an agency closure due to COVID-19?

Yes. During an agency closure due to COVID-19, when an agency Continuity of Operation Plan (COOP) has not been initiated and the World Health Organization has not declared a pandemic, telework program participants will generally be expected to continue working from home. All telework program participants will be ineligible for Health and Safety Leave. They must telework for the entire workday, take other leave (paid or unpaid) or other time off, or use a combination of telework and leave or other paid time off. (Note: A telework program participant may also be referred to as a "telework-ready" employee.)

4. What happens when employee's child's school or care giver location is closed?

An agency that has a general restriction on teleworking when there are young children or other persons requiring care and supervision may choose to adjust its policies to allow, as a special exception, telework in those circumstances in the case of an emergency, such as the COVID-19 situation. Under such an exception policy, a teleworking employee would be expected to account for work and non-work hours during his or her tour of duty and take appropriate leave (paid or unpaid) to account for time spent away from normal work-related duties (e.g., to care for small children).

A. If County Government Offices Are Open

If County Government offices are open, agencies may not authorize Health and Safety Leave to employees who cannot telework with children in the home. Employees should either report to their worksite or request annual leave or other paid time off if they are unable to report to the worksite.

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B. If County Government Offices Are Closed

If County Government offices close, agencies may authorize Health and Safety Leave to employees who cannot telework with children in the home under agency policies and cannot safely travel to or perform work at the regular office location.

5. Should an agency authorize Health and Safety Leave to a telework program participant who was exposed to a confirmed case of a quarantinable communicable disease, such as COVID-19?

Use of Health and Safety Leave would be subject to the normal conditions—for example, Health and Safety Leave may be granted only if an employee is not able to safely travel to or perform work at an approved location. Thus, an employee who is not a telework program participant would be on Health and Safety Leave for quarantine periods under the direction of local or public health authorities. However, in the case of telework program participants, the employee's home is generally an approved location. Thus, the employee would generally be expected to perform telework at home as long as the employee is asymptomatic. If a telework program participant in these circumstances needs time off for personal reasons, then the employee would be expected to take other personal leave or paid time off (e.g., annual leave or sick leave to care for a family member).

6. What happens if an employee does not have a sufficient amount of work to perform to cover the entire telework day during incidences of COVID-19?

An employee must always have a sufficient amount of work to perform throughout the workday when he or she teleworks. An employee performing telework who does not have enough work must notify his or her supervisor and receive additional work or discuss leave options such as annual leave, advanced annual leave, other paid time off (e.g., earned compensatory time off, personal leave), or leave without pay.

D. Sick Leave and Other Time Off

1. If an employee, who has been receiving Health and Safety Leave due to exposure to COVID-19, becomes ill, should he or she continue to receive Health and Safety Leave?

No. Sick leave would be used to cover such a period of sickness, as provided in Personnel Procedure 284. Agencies must grant sick leave when an illness, such as COVID-19, prevents an employee from performing work.

2. If an employee runs out of sick leave, can the agency grant advanced sick leave to an employee who is ill (symptomatic) due to a quarantinable communicable disease, such as COVID-19, or must care for a family member who is ill?

Yes. However, while sick leave may be advanced at an agency's discretion, it is not an employee entitlement. The sick leave regulations allow an employee to be granted advanced sick leave for exposure to a quarantinable communicable disease, subject to the limitations below:

- 80 hours (10 days) may be advanced if the employee would jeopardize the health of others by his or her presence on the job because of exposure to a quarantinable communicable disease;
- 80 hours (10 days) may be advanced if the employee is providing care for a family member who would jeopardize the health of others by his or her presence in the community because of exposure to a quarantinable communicable disease.

Employees are also may be eligible for donated leave.

3. Must an employee have a doctor's note if requesting to use sick leave for 3 days or more due to an illness from a quarantinable communicable disease, such as COVID-19?

Not necessarily. Appointing Authorities and/or Deputy Directors should use their best judgment and follow their agency's internal practices for granting sick leave. Agencies should also be mindful about the burden and impact of requiring a medical certificate.

An agency may grant sick leave only when the need for sick leave is supported by administratively acceptable evidence. An agency may consider an employee's self-certification as to the reason for his or her absence as administratively acceptable evidence, regardless of the duration of the absence. An agency may also require a medical certificate or other administratively acceptable evidence as to the reason for an absence for any of the purposes for which sick leave is granted for an absence in excess of 3 workdays, or for a lesser period when the agency determines it is necessary.

4. If an employee is healthy but chooses to stay home because he or she has been in direct contact with an individual exposed to a quarantinable communicable disease, such as COVID-19, in what pay/leave status is the employee placed?

A. Employees with Telework Agreements

An employee, covered by a telework agreement, may request to telework with the permission of the supervisor. Agencies could also consider expanding telework to any telework eligible employees to provide additional flexibility for employees.

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B. *Employees without Telework Agreements*

For employees who are not currently covered by a telework agreement, agencies may also consider whether an employee has some portable duties (*e.g.*, reading reports; analyzing documents and studies; preparing written letters, memorandums, reports and other correspondence; setting up conference calls, or other tasks that do not require the employee to be physically present), that would allow him/her to telework on a situational basis. A situational telework agreement should be signed to cover the period the employee is permitted to work from the approved alternate location (*e.g.*, home).

C. *Employees Using Leave*

An employee may also request to take annual leave, advanced annual leave, other paid time off (*e.g.*, earned compensatory time off, personal leave), or leave without pay. An agency may not authorize Health and Safety Leave to an employee under this scenario. The use of sick leave would be limited to circumstances where an employee has become ill due to a quarantinable communicable disease, such as COVID-19.

5. If an employee is healthy but stays home because his or her asymptomatic family member has been quarantined due to exposure to COVID-19, in what pay/leave status is the employee placed?

A. *Employees Using Leave*

Currently, an employee may use annual leave, advanced annual leave, other paid time off (*e.g.*, earned compensatory time off, personal leave), or leave without pay to care for a family member who is healthy but has been quarantined due to COVID-19.

B. *Employees with Telework Agreements*

An employee, covered by a telework agreement, may be able to telework pursuant to a situational arrangement with the permission of the supervisor during the quarantine period. Provided the employee has telework capabilities and sufficient work to perform, the agency should be flexible in determining whether the employee can accomplish his or her duties from home while caring for a family member. An employee may telework during the time he or she is not responsible for caring for a family member and must request annual leave, advanced annual leave, other paid time off (*e.g.*, earned compensatory time off, personal leave), or leave without pay while caring for a family member.

E. Health and Safety Leave (Administrative Leave)

1. Can agencies approve Health and Safety Leave for an employee who has been exposed to a quarantinable communicable disease, such as Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

Agencies may authorize with approval from the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) and the Office of Law (OOL) Health and Safety Leave for an asymptomatic employee

who is subject to movement restrictions (quarantine or isolation) under the direction of public health authorities due to a significant risk of exposure to a quarantinable communicable disease, such as COVID-19.

2. If an employee is healthy but stays at home because he/she has been in direct contact with an individual infected with a quarantinable communicable disease such as COVID-19, should an agency authorize Health and Safety Leave?

An agency may authorize with approval from OHRM and OOL Health and Safety Leave to an employee exposed to COVID-19, even if asymptomatic, if a local health authority determines the employee would jeopardize the health of others if allowed to return to work.

3. If an employee must stay home to care for an asymptomatic family member who was exposed to a quarantinable communicable disease, such as COVID-19, should an agency authorize Health and Safety Leave?

No. An agency should not authorize Health and Safety Leave in this instance. An employee who is healthy and is caring for an asymptomatic family member may request annual leave, advanced annual leave, other paid time off (e.g., earned compensatory time off, personal leave, donated leave), or leave without pay for the period of absence from his or her job. In addition, an employee who is caring for an asymptomatic family member who has been exposed to a quarantinable communicable disease and who is covered by a telework agreement may also request to telework pursuant to a situational arrangement to the extent possible.

If the employee's family member becomes ill with a quarantinable communicable disease, such as COVID-19, sick leave to care for a family member with a serious health condition would be appropriate.

F. Workplace Precautions to Prevent Exposure to COVID-19

1. If an employee works in an occupation at risk for exposure to a quarantinable communicable disease such as COVID-19, what can he or she do to stay safe and prevent the spread of the disease to others?

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) published guidance and recommended measures to help prevent occupational exposure to COVID-19 in public workplaces. See OSHA's COVID-19 guidance at <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/index.html>.

See also CDC guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html>

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2. If an employee wants personal protective equipment (PPE), how do they obtain it?

Employees should contact their Agency Director and/or Deputy Director to determine the best recommendation for PPE for their job.

3. Is the County canceling meetings or events?

Please work with your department leadership and use good judgment about which public meetings or events are essential and limit the number of people present where possible. Consider conducting essential and non-essential meetings or events using Skype or teleconference where practical. If your event includes older adults or those with chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, or lung disease, you may wish to consider postponing since this population has a higher risk for complications. If departments would like guidance about particular meetings or events, please elevate those concerns for advice and decisions. Events should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Before cancelling or postponing a public facing meeting, make sure you've coordinated with division and department leadership.