

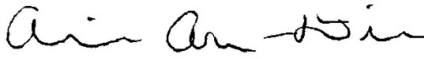


EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

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M-21-15

MEMORANDUM FOR HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

FROM: Aviva Aron-Dine 
Executive Associate Director

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Safe Federal Workplace: Agency Model Safety Principles

This memo provides guidance to agencies following the release of the President's Executive Order (EO) on [Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing](#). This EO, which is part of the [National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness](#), states that:

It is the policy of the Administration to halt the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by relying on the best available data and science-based public health measures. Such measures include wearing masks when around others, physical distancing, and other related precautions recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Put simply, masks and other public health measures reduce the spread of the disease, particularly when communities make widespread use of such measures, and thus save lives.

Pursuant to this EO, agencies should immediately require masks and distancing consistent with current CDC guidance in all Federal buildings.

To provide ongoing guidance to heads of agencies on the operation of the Federal Government, the safety of its employees, and the continuity of Government functions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the President has established a Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. The Task Force's guidance and recommendations to departments and agencies will be based on public health best practices as determined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health experts and will be co-chaired by the Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Administrator of General Services (GSA), and the COVID-19 Response Coordinator, with membership from several agencies.

As an initial step, to support the implementation of this Executive Order, the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force and OMB are providing agencies with model safety principles for executive departments and agencies as they build tailored COVID-19 workplace safety plans (see Appendix I). These model principles are intended to assist agencies in fulfilling the

requirement to: "immediately take action, as appropriate and consistent with applicable law, to require compliance with CDC guidelines with respect to wearing masks, maintaining physical distance, and other public health measures by: on-duty or on-site Federal employees; on-site Federal contractors; and all persons in Federal buildings or on Federal lands."

Specifically, agencies are required to review the attached model principles and develop tailored agency COVID-19 workplace safety plans. The 24 Chief Financial Officer Act agencies must submit their plans by Friday, January 29 to the following site: <https://go.max.gov/covid-19plans>. Other agencies do not need to submit their plans.

Following agency submissions, the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force and OMB will work with agencies to review and finalize plans. The principles outlined in the attached model should be used as a starting point for individual agency workforce safety plans, and agencies should adjust, as appropriate, for its mission requirements. Agencies with on-site contractor employees should make appropriate refinements to ensure the principles are applied to contractor employees in a manner that achieves workplace safety. This document is not meant to be comprehensive, and additional implementing guidance will follow as necessary and as conditions evolve, following guidance from the CDC and the Safer Workforce Task Force.

As implementation plans are implemented, agencies should continue to ensure that all employees, on-site contractors, and visitors to Federal workplaces are aware of the requirement to comply with CDC guidelines, including with respect to wearing masks and following appropriate distancing practices.

If agencies have additional questions on OMB MAX access or the development of the safety plan, please direct questions to the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force at SaferFederalWorkforce@gsa.gov.

Of paramount concern is the health and safety of all Federal employees and contractors and their families, and the Administration is committed to taking a safe, cautious, iterative, data-driven approach. Thank you for your important role in ensuring the health and safety of our Federal workforce and contractors, their families, and the public in our Federal workplaces.

Attachment

Appendix 1: COVID-19 Safe Federal Workplace: Agency Model Safety Principles

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide model safety principles for executive departments and agencies (hereafter, “agency” and collectively, “agencies”) as they build tailored COVID-19 workplace safety plans. In his Executive Order, “[Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing](#),” dated January 20, 2021, President Biden established a “Safer Federal Workforce Task Force” to oversee the development and implementation of agency COVID-19 workplace safety plans across the Federal Government.

This document is primarily focused on application of U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines to the Federal workplace—specifically related to masking and physical distancing. This document is not meant to be comprehensive, and additional implementing guidance will follow as necessary.

This document establishes a minimum level for workplace safety standards associated with masking and physical distancing across the Federal government. In developing their own COVID-19 workplace safety plans, agencies should build upon these principles. Agencies should consult with the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force to discuss special circumstances or higher-risk work environments.

Agencies should use this document as a starting point for revisions of their existing COVID-19 workplace safety plans and adjust existing plans as necessary. Agencies with on-site contractor employees should address how the protocols below are being applied to contractor employees to ensure Federal workplace safety in the context of COVID-19.

Agency Actions

Agencies should:

1. Immediately require correct and consistent use of masks and physical distancing consistent with current CDC guidance in all Federal buildings.¹
2. Review the safety principles below and adapt as necessary to meet the needs of the agency.
3. Designate a COVID-19 coordination team within the agency.

In addition, the 24 Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Act agencies must submit a COVID-19 workplace safety plan (revised or drafted consistent with the principles in this document) to the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force, via the submission instructions in the cover memo accompanying this document, no later than January 29, 2021. While formally submitted COVID-19 workplace safety plans are only required of CFO Act agencies, the principles below should be applied to all Federal agencies and workplaces, including small and independent agencies. Agency implementation policies and plans should be consistent with the following principles and elements.

¹ See section 7(a)(ii) of the Executive Order, “Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing,” dated January 20, 2021: “[...]“Federal buildings” means buildings, or office space within buildings, owned, rented, or leased by the executive branch of which a substantial portion of occupants are Federal employees or Federal contractors [...]”.

Overview of Model Principles

The Federal Government is committed to addressing essential work requirements consistent with best public health practices. The Administration's paramount concern is the health and safety of all federal employees, on-site contractors, and individuals interacting with the Federal workforce. As set forth in the January 20, 2021 Executive Order on "Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing," the policy of the Administration is "to halt the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by relying on the best available data and science-based public health measures," including taking a science-based and data-driven approach to safety in Federal workplaces.

The principles presented here are aligned to the [latest guidance](#) from the CDC and established public health best practices, based on evolving understanding of the pandemic. Principles will be reassessed over time, as conditions warrant.

Goal

The health and safety of the Federal workforce is the Administration's highest priority.

Health and Safety

Telework and Remote Work

Employees currently working remotely on a frequent or regular basis (e.g., if on an expanded remote work schedule, such as "maximum telework") will be given advance notice and guidance before returning to the physical workplace. The agency's human resources (HR) team will evaluate activities, on an on-going basis, that may require on-site work.

As a general principle, every effort will be made to maximize the use of remote work during widespread community transmission. Unless it is physically impossible or poses a threat to critical national security interests, generally speaking, occupancy in Federal workplaces should be no more than 25% of normal capacity during periods of significant or high community transmission, as discussed further in the occupancy section below. Levels of community transmission can be established by consulting CDC's [COVID Data Tracker County View](#).

COVID-19 Coordination Team

By January 26, 2021, each agency should establish a COVID-19 Coordination Team. This team should—at minimum—include a representative from: each component agency (if applicable); HR; occupational safety and health; executive leadership; counsel's office; and a public health expert. If such an expert does not exist at the agency, a delegate will be designated by the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. The team is responsible for conducting assessments in order to establish, implement, and monitor compliance with: (a) safety protocols for physical space and masking; and (b) determinations of on-site and telework/remote working. The group should meet regularly to review compliance with agency COVID-19 workplace safety plans and protocols, consider potential revisions to agency COVID-19 workplace safety plans and protocols, and any other operational needs. For CFO Act agencies, this team should review draft COVID-19 workplace safety plans and protocols for the agency, make any necessary changes, and submit plans to the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force for review and comment. Where appropriate, the agency's COVID-19 Coordination Team may consult with the General Services Administration (GSA), the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). For privately owned and Federally leased space, the team should coordinate with GSA and building security and safety committees.

Face Masks

Federal employees and on-site contractors must [wear a mask](#) that [covers the nose and mouth](#), and is in accordance with any current CDC and OSHA guidance. CDC [recommends](#) the following: Non-medical disposable masks, masks that fit properly (snugly around the nose and chin with no large gaps around the sides of the face), masks made with breathable fabric (such as cotton), masks made with tightly woven fabric (i.e., fabrics that do not let light pass through when held up to a light source), masks with two or three layers, and masks with inner filter pockets. Agencies should not allow novelty/non-protective masks, masks with ventilation valves, or face shields as a substitute for masks.

To the extent funds are available, agencies may purchase masks to provide to staff and visitors, but are not required to provide masks. Agencies may determine that agency-supplied non-medical disposable masks should be worn rather than employee-supplied masks. When making this determination, agencies should consult with the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force for advice. Wearing masks may be difficult for some people with sensory, cognitive, or behavioral issues. If they are unable to wear a mask properly or cannot tolerate a mask, they should not wear one, and [adaptations and alternatives](#) should be considered. Accommodations will be made for individuals with required documentation, and should be in accordance with existing Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) guidance.

Appropriate masks should be worn consistently. Masks should be worn in any common areas or shared workspaces (including open floorplan office space, cubicle embankments, and conference rooms). Masks should also be worn in outdoor shared spaces when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Agencies may provide for exceptions consistent with CDC guidelines, for example when an individual is alone in an office with floor to ceiling walls and a closed door or for a limited time when eating or drinking and maintaining distancing in accordance with CDC guidelines.

Individuals may be asked to lower their masks briefly for identification purposes in compliance with safety and security requirements.

If agencies need assistance in procuring masks, they should work with GSA and the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force, subject to the availability of appropriations.

Masks do not provide the same level of protection as respirators and should not replace personal protective equipment required or recommended at the workplace.

Testing

As required in the Executive Order, the CDC is developing and submitting a testing plan for the Federal workforce to the COVID-19 Response Coordinator. Once that plan is available, the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force will follow up with agencies to provide additional guidance.

Contact Tracing

The agency's COVID-19 Coordination Team will collaborate with and support the contact tracing programs of local health departments to help identify, track, and manage contacts of COVID-19 cases. The agency's HR Team will engage in coordination with facilities staff to implement infection control and workplace safety efforts once informed of a case of COVID-19 (either due to specific symptoms or positive test).

The agency's HR team, Assistant Secretary for Management team, or both, have the responsibility to make disclosures to local public health officials as required or necessary to provide for the public health and safety of Federal employees and contractors, in accordance with local public health mandates. If

COVID-19 cases occur within a specific building or work setting, it will be the responsibility of that agency's COVID-19 Coordination Team (or a field office/agency component designee) to determine—in consultation with local public health officials—appropriate next steps. Agencies should be transparent in communicating related information to the workforce, as relevant and appropriate, consistent with local and Federal privacy and confidentiality regulations and laws.

Travel

Federal employees should adhere strictly to CDC [guidelines](#) before, during, and after travel, regardless of whether the travel is personal or for official business. At this time, these include the following precautions: carefully assessing travel risk prior to travel, wearing a mask during all portions of a trip, maintaining physical distance from non-household members, maintaining good hand hygiene by regularly washing hands with soap and water, or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available, and getting tested and staying home after higher-risk travel before returning to the workplace. The CDC has extensive guidelines for both domestic and international travel, and federal workers should consult these resources carefully before deciding to travel. Additional resources for official travel can be found on the [GSA COVID-19 Information Site](#).

Employees should be aware that they may be required to stay at home for a period of time after official or personal travel (typically allowing the employee to request personal leave when it results from personal travel, if an employee is otherwise expected to be present onsite) before they are allowed to return to the workplace, as well as following any testing guidance once issued. Private transportation for official travel is preferred to use of public or other communal transportation, in combination with other safety/security guidance.

Given currently high levels of transmission in the United States, official domestic travel should be limited to only mission critical trips. International travel should also be avoided if at all possible, unless it is mission critical (e.g., military deployments, COVID-19 response deployments/activities, diplomats traveling, high-level international negotiations that cannot occur remotely). Heads of agencies should issue more specific guidance to account for the particulars of their agency's mission, limiting official travel as much as possible.

Symptom Monitoring

If Federal employees, on-site contractors, or visitors are not feeling well, they should not enter the Federal workplace.

Federal employees and contractors working on site will be asked to regularly complete symptom screening (e.g., a symptom questionnaire, an exposure history questionnaire, a temperature check), on a daily basis or upon entry to the workplace. The agency will use this information to assess the individual's risk level and to determine whether they should be allowed entry to the workplace. Visitors will also be asked to complete symptom screening before entering a Federal facility. In developing these tools, agencies may adapt the one used by [CDC](#).

Agencies should also consider using mobile/web application tools to help facilitate this process.

A symptom list requiring immediate medical attention can be accessed on the CDC website [here](#).

Any individual who develops [any symptoms consistent with COVID-19](#) during the workday must immediately isolate, notify their supervisor, and promptly leave the workplace. The Agency should have processes in place to provide advice and support to supervisors on any related reporting or HR requirements.

Quarantine and Isolation

Any individual with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 will be advised to isolate, [pursuant to CDC guidelines](#), and in compliance with local laws/regulations. Personnel who have had a close contact in the past seven days with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 should follow CDC and local guidance for quarantine.

Confidentiality

All medical information collected from personnel, including test results and any other information obtained as a result of testing and symptom monitoring, will be treated confidentially in accordance with applicable law, and accessible only by those with a need to know in order to protect the health and safety of personnel. Agencies should identify a point of contact for all questions relating to personal medical data.

Workplace Operations

Occupancy

No Federal workplace should operate above 25% of normal occupancy standards at any given time during periods of high community prevalence or transmission. Exceptions to this policy must be cleared by the head of the agency as advised by the agency's COVID-19 Coordination Team and in consultation with the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. The agency's COVID-19 Coordination Team should develop a staffing plan that outlines which employees will work on-site full-time, on-site occasionally, or fully remote.

Physical Distancing

To the extent practicable, individuals will be asked to maintain distance of at least six feet from others at all times, consistent with CDC guidelines, including in offices, conference rooms, and all other communal and work spaces. Distance and testing are not substitutes for wearing masks. Individuals should maintain distance AND properly wear masks. One-way walkways, reconfiguration of workspaces or office assignments, and other mitigation strategies may be implemented to minimize interactions.

Environmental Cleaning

Enhanced cleaning in common use/high touch/high density spaces, such as lobbies, restrooms, elevators, and stairwells will be provided. Office space that is in regular use will be cleaned regularly, and in accordance with CDC guidelines. Wipes, gloves, and other EPA-approved disinfectants will be made available for individuals to wipe down their workstation and related personal property. Physical barriers such as plexiglass shields may be installed where appropriate.

In the event of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the workplace (if the individual had been in the building up to seven days prior), enhanced environmental cleaning will be performed in accordance with [CDC](#) and GSA guidance.

If such enhanced cleaning is required, wait 24 hours before cleaning or disinfecting. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible. Personnel and visitors may be asked to vacate the affected space until cleaning or disinfection is completed.

The agency's COVID-19 Coordination Team will determine the appropriate scope of workplace closures—in some cases, it may be a suite or offices or part of a floor, in other cases, it may include an entire building.

Hygiene

Hand sanitizer stations are to be available at the building entrance and throughout workspaces, and should contain FDA-approved hand sanitizer, with at least 60% ethanol. Personnel will be encouraged to wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer or alcohol-based hand rubs frequently.

Ventilation and Air Filtration

Additional modifications may be considered in accordance with CDC guidance, including as density increases. To the maximum extent feasible, indoor ventilation will be optimized to increase the proportion of outdoor ventilation, improve filtration, and reduce or eliminate recirculation.

Visitors

The number of visitors to the Federal workplace should be minimized, and efforts should be made to conduct visits virtually where possible. Any visitor should be screened, tested if appropriate, and asked to fill out a symptom questionnaire form before entering the workplace. Mask wearing requirements will also apply to any visitors to Federal or federally leased facilities.

Staggered Work Times and Cohort-Based Scheduling

Personnel will be encouraged to stagger work times to reduce density, minimize traffic volume in elevators, and avoid crowds during commuting. Agencies are also able to implement cohort-based scheduling, to help reduce exposure. Agency HR teams should work with OPM to understand the pay and leave implications surrounding staggered work schedules and other flexibilities.

Elevators

Occupational health professionals in each agency should assess elevators to determine safe occupancy. Individuals must wear masks in elevators and in elevator lobbies. The use of stairs by those who are physically able is strongly encouraged. Signage will be posted to explain current procedures.

Shared Spaces

Shared tools and equipment must be disinfected by users anytime the equipment is used by or transferred to a new person, and disinfectant wipes will be provided by the agency. This includes phones, computers and other communication devices, kitchen implements, and other office equipment. Refrigerators, water coolers, and coffee brewers with disposable cups (or a personal re-usable cup/container) and single serve condiments and creamers may be used with proper hand hygiene. Visual markers may be installed to promote physical distancing within common spaces, and furniture may be removed. Steps may be taken to limit the number of people who can use common spaces at any one time, and signage outlining these limits should be prominently displayed.