USDA COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan

USDA provides critical services for curbing poverty and hunger, makes credit available for rural development (where approximately 20% of Americans live), stabilizes or improves domestic farm income, manages the integrity of critical natural resources, ensures the quality of food supplies, develops markets for agricultural products and services, and sustains the productivity of the Nation's forests, grasslands and natural resources. This workplace safety plan was created in response to a memorandum issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on January 24, 2021 (M-21-15) in response to the Executive Order, Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing, which is part of the National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness. Since then, it has been updated based on evolving guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

USDA created this workplace safety plan to guide how Mission Areas, Agencies and Staff Offices can implement public health best practices as determined by the CDC. As we have done since the start of the pandemic, USDA will work to balance delivery of our critical missions with adapting to the everyday challenges that COVID-19 presents to the workforce. The health and safety of the USDA workforce and contractors is paramount.

State, local, or Tribal governments may provide guidance that differs from this plan but this is the Federal requirement minimum, regardless of such guidance. However, where a locality has imposed additional pandemic-related requirements more protective than those set forth in these model safety principles, those requirements should be followed in Federal buildings and on Federal land in that locality. USDA aims to be a partner in our communities to slow the spread of COVID-19.

In response to the memorandum we have:

- Issued USDA-wide guidance that is consistent with current CDC guidance
- Reviewed the safety principles provided by OMB and adapted them to meet the needs of USDA
- Designated a COVID-19 coordination team within USDA, including a Senior Advisor for COVID in the Office of the Secretary who will coordinate the work of this team (see Appendix)

The USDA COVID-19 workplace safety plan is as follows:

**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 at least 45 days’ notice and guidance before returning to the physical workplace. In some cases, mission critical work may require a shorter notification period. This information should be included in tailored agency plans (please see below on page 3 for how tailored plans will be reviewed). In determining the advance notice provided to employees, USDA agencies will ensure labor management agreements are followed. USDA’s agency leaders, with support from human resources (HR), will evaluate activities, on an ongoing 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.

Levels of community transmission will be established by consulting [CDC’s COVID Data Tracker County View](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-your-community/index.html). Essential employees whose duties cannot be performed remotely are advised to follow best health practices identified by the CDC.

**COVID-19 Coordination Team**

USDA has established a COVID-19 Coordination Team which includes a representative from each mission area, Office of Human Resources Management, executive leadership, Office of the General Counsel, occupational safety and health, and two public health experts (see Appendix). The team works in collaboration with USDA unions. The Office of Operations provides occupational safety and health expertise for the National Capital Region. Mission areas leverage their mission area capacity and are called on to support the COVID-19 Coordination Team. The team is responsible for conducting assessments in order to establish, implement, and monitor compliance with: (a) safety protocols for physical space including occupancy limits, cleaning, ventilation and social distancing protocols; (b) masking; and (c) determinations of on-site and telework/remote working. The USDA COVID-19 Coordination Team meets weekly to review compliance with USDA COVID-19 workplace safety plans and protocols, consider potential revisions to USDA’s COVID-19 workplace safety plans and protocols, and any other operational needs. The USDA COVID-19 Coordination Team reviews draft COVID-19 workplace safety plans and protocols for USDA, makes any necessary changes, and submits plans to the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force for review and comment. As appropriate, the USDA 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 USDA COVID-19 Coordination Team coordinates with GSA, building security and safety committees, and facility pandemic coordinators. We have proactive and iterative engagement with Federal employee unions on draft policies and on policy implementation, per the EO. To the extent USDA agency Collective Bargaining Agreement(s) provide stronger protections to employees than those outlined in this plan, the CBA(s) will be followed.

With respect to training and notification of the workforce, because USDA encompasses such a diverse workforce, we solicit mission areas and agency input on how they propose training be conducted/completed for their employees. For example, some may want to leverage town halls while others may decide to include a mandatory training to AgLearn where the USDA workplace safety plan could be posted and employees could certify that they reviewed it. Supporting our employees, including front-line supervisors and employees is a priority for USDA. Agencies and Offices are strongly encouraged to identify and implement trainings that effectively guide employees on how to work and navigate working in a hybrid, and at times full-remote environment, prioritizes the safety and well-being of employees, and further strengthens the trust across our Department.

**Face Masks and other PPE**

Federal employees must be fully vaccinated, except in limited circumstances where an employee is legally entitled to a reasonable or religious accommodation that provides for an exemption to the [vaccine mandate](https://www.whitehouse.gov). In addition, some contractor employees may not yet be subject to a contractual requirement to be vaccinated, and some visitors may not be fully vaccinated or decline
to provide information on their vaccination status. USDA employees, on-site contractors, partners, volunteers, customers, and visitors who are fully vaccinated and working in parts of the country characterized as having “high” or “substantial” COVID-19 transmission, are required to wear a mask in Federal buildings and in government owned or leased vehicles, except for the limited exceptions outlined below. Managers and employees should utilize the CDC COVID Data Tracker website to determine whether they are located in one of these areas.

Regardless of locality, all individuals who are not fully vaccinated (at least 2 weeks past the final dose) are required to wear a mask and practice physical distancing in Federal buildings, government owned or leased vehicles, and on Federal property and adhere to applicable CDC quarantine requirements.

In other parts of the country, CDC guidance indicates that fully vaccinated people can safely participate in most activities, indoor or outdoor, without wearing a mask or social distancing. Individuals in this scenario may voluntarily decide to wear a mask or practice physical distancing but are not required to do so.

These Federal masking requirements are the minimum that are required, regardless of State, local, or Tribal laws and regulations regarding masking. However, federal employees that work in areas that have stricter State, local, Tribal, or mask mandates should follow those masking requirements.

To the extent funds are available, USDA will provide masks when requested for staff and visitors. The degree to which agencies will provide PPE will be negotiated at the agency level. When making this determination, USDA will consult with the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force for advice. If any employee is unable to wear a mask properly, adaptations and alternatives will be considered. Accommodations will be made for individuals with required documentation and should be in accordance with existing USDA and Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) guidance.

Appropriate masks must be worn consistently. When required, masks must be worn while inside all Federal buildings, while inside any private office spaces leased by USDA or the Federal government, and while riding in USDA vehicles. Masks must be worn in common areas or shared workspaces (including open floorplan office space, cubicle embankments, conference rooms, and USDA vehicles).

For all unvaccinated individuals, masks must also be worn in outdoor shared spaces when physical distancing cannot be maintained. USDA considers that to include an array of outdoor areas, ranging from areas where people can sit outside to eat or socialize (e.g., the patio in Wing 3 of the South Building) to outdoor recreation areas (e.g., the National Arboretum).

USDA’s agencies may provide for masking exceptions consistent with CDC guidelines, for example when an individual is alone in an office with floor to ceiling walls and a closed door, when an individual is alone in a vehicle, or for a limited time when eating or drinking and maintaining distancing in accordance with CDC guidelines. Exceptions to the masking requirement must be cleared by the head of the respective agency as advised by the agency’s COVID-19 Coordination Team as well as the Office of the General Counsel and in consultation with the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. Agency employees, onsite contractors, and visitors—as well as the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force—will be made aware of any approved exceptions and related
science-based risk/hazard mitigation protocols consistent with CDC guidance via USDA communications (detailed below). This document is meant to govern workforce safety practices at USDA, but mission areas may submit tailored COVID-19 workplace safety plans for outdoor shared spaces to the USDA COVID-19 Coordination Team for approval.

Masks must cover the nose and mouth in accordance with 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. USDA will not permit non-protective masks, masks with exhalation valves, or face shields as a substitute for masks.

Failure to comply with these requirements may lead to appropriate administrative action. This policy is to protect the health and safety of our workforce by limiting the exposure to COVID-19. For purposes of this certification, employees are considered “fully vaccinated” two weeks after completing the second dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine (e.g., Pfizer or Moderna) or two weeks after receiving a single dose of a one-dose vaccine (e.g., Johnson & Johnson/Janssen).

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

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

Please note that masking is still required for fully vaccinated people in some settings such as while flying or taking public transit, and indoor spaces where social distancing is not possible during periods of high community prevalence or transmission.

Process for tailored plans: The development, updating, and review of tailored facility level plans is delegated to the agency level. All plans are reviewed by the USDA COVID-19 Coordination Team and the Office of the General Counsel for final approval. Agencies are expected to post final plans on the Department’s SharePoint site.

Vaccination Status for Employees, Contractors, and Visitors

Vaccination Status for Employees

To ensure the safety of the USDA workforce, all USDA employees must be fully vaccinated by November 22, 2021, except in limited circumstances when an employee is legally entitled to a reasonable or religious accommodation that provides an exemption to this requirement. Employees are considered “fully vaccinated” two weeks after completing the second dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine (e.g., Pfizer or Moderna) or two weeks after receiving a single dose of a one-dose vaccine (e.g., Johnson & Johnson/Janssen).

Employees who are not vaccinated due to medical or religious reasons may use the Agency’s established reasonable or religious accommodation process to seek an accommodation, if necessary, related to Agency safety protocols or procedures.
When a Federal employee is required to be vaccinated, the time the employee spends obtaining any COVID-19 vaccination (including travel time) is duty time; thus, there is no need for the employee to take administrative leave for such time during the employee’s basic tour of duty. If, due to unforeseen circumstances, the employee is unable to obtain the vaccine during basic tour of duty hours, the normal overtime hours of work rules apply.

Employees will receive paid time off to address any side effects. Administrative leave of up to two days is authorized if any employee has an adverse reaction to a COVID-19 vaccination dose (i.e., no more than 2 workdays for reactions associated with a single dose.) Employees should work with their supervisor and HR organization to change timesheets in accordance with the guidance and answer any specific questions you might have.

Employees will also receive up to four hours of administrative leave per dose to accompany a family member being vaccinated. For this purpose, a “family member” is an individual who meets the definition of that term in OPM’s leave regulations (see 5 CFR 630.201).

Only persons with a need to know will have access to an employee’s vaccine verification information. The documentation will be held in accordance with all applicable laws, including the Privacy Act. If an employee signs and submits a paper form, then this form, like all medical information, must be kept confidential and stored separately from the employee’s personnel files.

USDA will not disclose the vaccination status of its employees because of applicable laws that require the Agency to maintain the confidentiality of Federal employee medical information, including the confirmation of COVID-19 vaccination. While USDA cannot divulge vaccination status, USDA has implemented a robust workplace safety program to limit the spread of COVID-19. Employees are expected to comply with USDA’s established safety protocols for vaccinated and unvaccinated employees.

If a Federal employee refuses to be vaccinated or provide proof of vaccination and does not have an approved religious or reasonable accommodation for a vaccine exemption, USDA will pursue disciplinary measures, up to and including removal from Federal service.

- Vaccination Status for Contractors

USDA anticipates further guidance on vaccine requirements for Federal contractors but all Federal contractor employees will be required to be vaccinated. Prior to being contractually required to be vaccinated, onsite contractor employees who are not fully vaccinated and are not part of an agency testing program must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than the previous 3 days prior to entry to a Federal building.

A contractor is defined as someone performing a procurement contract providing goods or services for the direct use of the Federal government that is governed by the Federal Acquisition Regulation.

“On-site” means contractor personnel, cooperators, volunteers, visiting guests of USDA employees, USDA remote employees, visiting employees of other non-USDA Federal agencies, and elected USDA county committee members who share USDA facilities (which includes vehicles and aircraft) or work at an outdoor site together with Federal employees on a regular basis on activities that make social distancing impractical or is contraindicated by operational
needs to complete work to be performed (e.g., Forest Service firefighting crews; county committee meetings and executive sessions).

For delivery services where a delivery driver may spend more than 30 minutes delivering packages to various offices, the non-employee contractor/visitor vaccine certification form should be completed. For short drop-offs (approximately 30 minutes or less), the vaccine certification form is not required but these individuals do need to follow the masking requirements.

Onsite contractor employees who are not yet contractually required to be vaccinated and who are not fully vaccinated or who decline to provide information on their vaccination status must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than 3 days prior to entry to a Federal building. If a contractor employee is regularly tested pursuant to an agency testing program, they do not need to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than 3 days prior to entry to a Federal building unless required by the agency testing program. These protocols are in line with the revised model safety principles from the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. Prior to contractor employees being subject to a contractual requirement to be vaccinated, on-site contractors should complete the Certification of Vaccination form and present it upon entry to a Federal Building or Federal worksite. A paper copy of the form can also be completed upon arrival. On-site contractors are expected to keep the completed Certification of Vaccination form on their person while they are inside a Federal building. Agencies are not collecting or maintaining contractors’ Certification of Vaccination forms at this time.

It is the responsibility of the COR’s (Contracting Officer Representative) to work with the contracting company to determine the vaccination status of contractors and ensure they follow the appropriate COVID safety protocols. Agencies should do this in a way that makes most sense for them (e.g., they could ask the contracting company to report to the COR about the vaccine status of contractors on a weekly basis).

Vaccination Status for Visitors

A visitor is defined as anyone who is not a USDA employee or a contractor and includes groups such as: volunteers (further OMB guidance expected), cooperators (further OMB guidance expected), and stakeholders. Visitors should complete this form in advance or complete in paper copy upon arrival. USDA facilities will be instructed to make paper copies of the blank certification of vaccination form available at building entrances, as appropriate.

Visitors are expected to show the completed form upon entry into a Federal building or Federally controlled indoor worksite and then keep the form on their person while they are inside a Federal building or Federal worksite. Agencies should not collect or maintain visitors’ certification of vaccination forms at this time. It is the responsibility of the host agency (including in multi-tenant buildings) to ensure that a visitor has completed the vaccine certification form and is following the appropriate COVID safety protocols. Agencies should do this in a way that makes most sense for them. In co-located facilities, agencies are required to harmonize on how they are checking the information and ensure compliance with appropriate COVID safety protocols. USDA expects further guidance from OMB on this to be forthcoming.

Visitors who are not fully vaccinated or who decline to provide information about their vaccination status must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than the previous 3 days prior to entry to a Federal building. Of note, members of the public entering
a Federal building or Federal land to obtain a public service or benefit are not required to provide their vaccination status or proof of a recent negative COVID-19 test. USDA defines a public benefit or service as applying to all visitors at services centers or field offices, recreation areas, food and nutrition direct service centers, and grain offices If they are not fully vaccinated, these visitors must comply with all relevant CDC guidance, including wearing a mask and physically distancing from other people.

If a customer refuses to comply with USDA’s safety protocols, USDA employees can considerately make customers aware of the masking requirement. Customers who will not honor USDA’s requirement should be asked, politely, to do so. If the customer refuses, that is the individual’s right, but they must be directed to conduct business off-site (over the phone or online) and to please depart the premises. USDA employees should remain respectful yet safe and call for assistance from local authorities if the situation cannot be resolved.

Testing
At this time, USDA is not establishing a Department-wide COVID screening testing program. In limited situations, agencies may establish a screening program as part of their agency tailored plans. USDA is establishing a process for employee diagnostic testing after a workplace exposure. More information on that process is forthcoming.

Contact Tracing
USDA’s COVID-19 Coordination Team collaborates with and supports the contact tracing programs of mission areas to assist local health departments to identify, track, and manage contacts of COVID-19 cases. Facility pandemic coordinators implement infection control and workplace safety efforts once informed of a known or suspected case of COVID-19 (either due to specific symptoms or positive test). Employees who remain on enhanced telework status may choose to voluntarily disclose their positive COVID-19 result to their supervisor. Employees who have physically returned to their duty station must report a subsequent positive COVID-19 result to their supervisor.

Facility pandemic coordinators 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. Within the National Capital Region (NCR), the Director of the Office of Safety, Security and Protection is USDA’s NCR pandemic coordinator and has responsibility for notification. Employees who have returned to the office must report if they subsequently receive a positive COVID-19 result. Employees who remain on maximized telework and have not come into a USDA workspace may report a COVID-19 positive result. All positive COVID-19 cases reported (for employees and contractors) must be entered into the Department’s COVID Positive Test Dashboard which is accessible by the Pandemic Coordinators. In the Nation Capital Region, employees can access the SharePoint Tracker tool (which feeds the dashboard) to see test positive cases in the buildings.

If 3 COVID-19 cases occur in a month within a specific building or work setting, it will be the responsibility of USDA’s COVID-19 Coordination Team (or a field office/USDA component designee) to determine—in consultation with local public health officials—appropriate next steps. This may include potential redesign of safety practices in the building/work setting and/or reevaluation of work scheduling. USDA is transparent in communicating related information to the
workforce, as relevant and appropriate, consistent with local and Federal privacy and confidentiality regulations and laws.

**Travel for Official Business**

To protect employee health and safety, all employees should continue to limit official travel to mission critical activities, through January 3, 2022. Until January 3, 2022, any work-related travel must be assessed by managers to determine whether it meets the mission critical requirements and should consider transmission rates in the community to which the employee will travel. Mission critical refers to activities necessary for the ongoing operation of the Department and its programs which cannot be performed remotely. Until further notice, employees should continue to limit official travel to mission critical activities, as determined by each Agency, and follow CDC guidance, as appropriate. This decision to limit official travel to mission critical activities is made with the health and safety of our employees in mind. In limited circumstances where official travel is involved, Agencies may assign work based on an employee’s vaccination status where the quarantine requirements for unvaccinated individuals in the destination locale would negatively impact the unvaccinated employee’s ability to perform the assignment.

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), through January 3, 2022. Private transportation for official travel is preferred to use of public or other communal transportation, in combination with other safety/security guidance. USDA will follow guidance from the Department of State with regard to USDA employees at overseas duty stations.

**All travelers, including fully vaccinated Federal employees, should continue to take health and safety precautions.** CDC COVID-19 prevention measures continue to apply to all travelers, including those who are vaccinated. All travelers are required to wear a mask over nose and mouth on all planes, buses, trains, and other forms of public transportation traveling into, within, or out of the United States and in U.S. transportation hubs such as airports and stations.

USDA employees traveling for official business should adhere to CDC guidelines on travel. Supervisors must comply with any tailored agency plan before approving official travel and employees must follow any tailored agency plan before, during, and after official travel. At this time, CDC guidance includes 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 (as defined by the CDC) 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.

For employees who need to quarantine after work-related travel, administrative leave or weather/safety leave may be provided.

**Off Duty Activities**

If an employee needs to quarantine based on CDC guidance due to exposure that is not related to their employment at USDA, they should telework during that period if possible. If the employee is not eligible for telework, they should follow CDC guidance on getting a COVID test and
quarantine until they either receive negative test results or CDC guidance indicates that the quarantine period is sufficient.

**Symptom Monitoring**

If USDA employees, on-site contractors, or visitors are not feeling well, they should not enter the USDA workplace. Federal employees and contractors working on site will regularly be asked to complete virtual or in-person health checks (such as a symptom questionnaire, an exposure history questionnaire, SARS CoV-2 testing and diagnosis status). This information will be used 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 USDA facility. In developing these tools, USDA may adapt the ones used by the CDC. USDA will consider using mobile/web application tools to help facilitate this process. Any individual who develops any *symptoms consistent with COVID-19* during the workday must immediately isolate, notify their supervisor, and promptly leave the workplace. USDA has processes in place to provide advice and support to supervisors on any related reporting or HR requirements. Additionally, USDA is evaluating re-establishing facility on-site health units to assist with ongoing health monitoring and prevention services. Until guidance is issued, USDA will consult with the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force with questions related to symptom monitoring for USDA overall or for specific facilities.

**Quarantine and Isolation**

Any individual with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 will be advised to isolate by their supervisor, pursuant to CDC guidelines, and in compliance with local laws/regulations. Personnel who have had a close contact *(as defined by the CDC)* with someone who has COVID-19 should follow CDC and local guidance for quarantine. As mentioned above, employees who have physically returned to their duty station must report a subsequent positive test result to their supervisor or agency point of contact. All positive COVID-19 cases reported must be entered into the Department’s Test Positive Tracking Tool, which is accessible by the Pandemic Coordinators. No personal identifiable information (PII) is collected in this tool.

Individuals who have been fully vaccinated and have had close contact with someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should get tested 3-5 days after exposure, even if they do not have symptoms. They should wear a mask indoors in public for 14 days following exposure or until their test result is negative. If their test result is positive, they should isolate for 10 days.

**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. The point of contact for all questions relating to personal medical data is the agency Reasonable Accommodation Coordinators since they are experienced in managing personal medical data. Employees will be asked to refer questions related to reasonable accommodation to the coordinators in their mission area, who are familiar with protecting medical data.
Workplace Operations

USDA expects all employees, on-site contractors, and all persons in USDA buildings or on USDA lands who have not received a vaccine to wear face masks, maintain physical distance, and take other public health measures as appropriate, which may include wearing a face shield or other personal protective equipment (PPE).

Occupancy

No USDA workplaces (owned or leased) will operate above 25% of normal occupancy standards at any given time during periods of high community prevalence or transmission. The 25% occupancy standard applies to the workforce, not visitors. Because of the diversity of USDA facilities, controls to ensure that 25% occupancy is not exceeded will be implemented at the facility level. Badging data will be leveraged to monitor occupancy. Exceptions to this policy will be made for mission critical work requiring greater than 25% occupancy (such as laboratories or ports) and made at the discretion of the mission area or agency. As mentioned above, these exceptions will be handled on a case-by-case basis and must be consistent with CDC guidance. Exceptions to the occupancy limit must be cleared by the head of the agency as advised by USDA’s COVID-19 Coordination Team as well as the Office of the General Counsel and in consultation with the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. Exceptions for office spaces must be cleared by USDA as advised by the USDA COVID-19 Coordination Team and in consultation with the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. The USDA COVID-19 Coordination Team or the agencies will develop a staffing plan that outlines which employees will work on-site full-time in a USDA facility, on-site occasionally in a USDA facility, or fully remote. Exceptions will be monitored in the facilities tracker on SharePoint.

Meeting, Conference, and Events

Any meeting, conference or event that will be attended by more than 50 in-person participants requires approval by the agency head, in consultation with USDA’s public health experts, Dr. Bleich and Parham. This approval process only applies for agency hosted events and includes both indoor and outdoor.

In person attendees at any meeting, conferences, and events hosted by USDA, regardless of size, must be asked to provide information about vaccination status. In requesting this information, USDA will comply with any applicable Federal laws, including requirements under the Privacy Act and the Paperwork Reduction Act. In person attendees, who are not fully vaccinated or decline to provide information about their vaccination status, must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test completed no later than the previous 3 days and comply with masking and physical distancing requirements for individuals who are not fully vaccinated consistent with the requirements for visitors. In person attendees in areas of high or substantial transmission must wear a mask in public indoor settings regardless of vaccination status.

Physical Distancing

To the extent practicable, individuals who have not been vaccinated 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 areas and workspaces. Distance and testing are not substitutes for wearing masks. Individuals must maintain distance AND properly wear masks (see guidance above). One-way walkways, reconfiguration of workspaces or office assignments, and other mitigation strategies should be implemented to minimize interactions. As noted above, masks should also be worn in outdoor shared spaces when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Please see communications section below detailing how information is shared with various USDA stakeholders.

**Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection**

Enhanced cleaning and disinfection 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 and disinfected regularly, and in accordance with CDC guidelines. Wipes, gloves, and EPA-approved disinfectants will be made available for individuals to wipe down their workstation and related personal property. Physical barriers such as plexiglass shields will be installed where appropriate as determined by the COVID Coordinator. Signage and cleaning supplies will be provided where share tools and equipment are located to ensure that users disinfect and clean before and after usage.

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 and disinfection will be performed in accordance with CDC and GSA guidance, which provides as follows:

- If fewer than 24 hours have passed since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, clean and disinfect the space.
- If more than 24 hours have passed since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, cleaning is enough. The space may be disinfected depending on certain conditions or everyday practices required by the facility.
- If more than 3 days have passed since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, no additional cleaning (beyond regular cleaning practices) is needed.

A person has suspected COVID-19 if they show symptoms of COVID-19 but either have not been tested via a viral test or are awaiting test results. If such enhanced cleaning is required, we will wait 24 hours before cleaning or disinfecting. If 24 hours is not feasible, we will wait as long as possible. Personnel and visitors may be asked to vacate the affected space until cleaning and disinfection is completed. As mentioned above, all positive COVID-19 cases reported must be entered into the Department’s SharePoint Tracker tool which is accessible by the Pandemic Coordinators and employees in the NCR.

USDA’s COVID-19 Coordination Team or local offices, as appropriate, will determine the suitable scope of workplace closures—in some cases, it may be a suite of 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 will contain FDA-approved hand sanitizer, with at least 60% ethanol. Personnel will be
encouraged to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer or alcohol-based hand rubs frequently. They will also be encouraged to follow CDC guidance on hand hygiene before eating, drinking or smoking, and after using the restroom.

**Ventilation and Air Filtration**

To the maximum extent feasible, indoor ventilation will be optimized to increase the proportion of outdoor ventilation, improve filtration, and reduce or eliminate recirculation. This has been completed and continues to be monitored for space occupied at the Headquarters Complex (Whitten and South Building) and the George Washington Carver Center. GSA and other private landlords handle the other leased facilities in the NCR including the Yates Building, Braddock Road, Riverdale, Thomas Circle, and Patriots Plaza. Agencies with field offices are responsible for these changes. Additional modifications may be considered in accordance with CDC guidance, including as percent occupancy increases.

**Visitors**

The number of visitors to the USDA workplaces will be minimized, and efforts should be made to conduct visits virtually where possible. Specifically, we restrict visitors to essential, time-sensitive, scheduled visits only, require visitors to be escorted at all times and limit visitor access to non-essential areas of the USDA. Any visitor may be screened, tested if appropriate, and asked to fill out a symptom questionnaire form before entering the workplace. Visitors are expected to follow CDC guidance for mask wearing and physical distancing in USDA or USDA leased facilities. Please see the guidance, above.

**Staggered Work Times and Cohort-Based Scheduling**

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

**Elevators**

Occupational health professionals in USDA 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 is posted to explain current procedures. Occupational health professionals will assess shared space occupancy to determine safe occupancy levels. USDA facilities will be responsible for developing controls to enforce elevator occupancy limits.

**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 USDA or the agencies. 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.

**Agency communication plan to inform Federal employees, onsite contractors, and visitors of current and upcoming policy changes**

USDA educates and informs employees, contractors, and visitors to USDA facilities and federal lands in a variety of ways.

**Employees and On-Site Contractors**

The USDA Intranet is a primary tool for communicating internal messages to staff working remotely as well as on-site. All USDA employees have access to the Intranet; guidance documents, memos, and letters from the leadership are posted regularly. Separately, the Office of the Secretary regularly distributes guidance (talking points) to Subcabinet officials, Agency Heads, and senior staff to help communicate directly to their teams; these leaders provide guidance to supervisors and line managers. The Office of the Secretary also uses email marketing techniques to reach staff and contractors with important news and information. Using email, USDA issues Department-wide guidance about evolving CDC guidance on masking and physical distancing. Finally, USDA posts signage and key messages at gateways of entry, doors, reception desks, commons areas such as restrooms and hallways, conference rooms, and Ranger District stations that provide information about policies and procedures related to COVID-19 for staff and contractors alike.

**Visitors and the Public**

USDA websites—USDA.gov as well as hundreds of Agency, State office and National Forest websites—are the primary means of communicating with the public. USDA and USDA Agencies also share key messages with the public via social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube). USDA posts signage and key messages at gateways of entry, doors, reception desks, commons areas such as restrooms and hallways, conference rooms, and Ranger District stations that provide information about policies and procedures related to COVID-19. USDA also utilizes radio via the USDA Radio services to distribute prepackaged radio stories and PSAs to radio stations across the country.

**Engagement with USDA Unions**

USDA’s COVID-19 safety plan is shared with the unions that have National Consultation Rights for feedback and input on implementation. Similarly, each USDA agency shares the safety plan with their respective union(s). This feedback guides policy development and implementation plans.

**Timeline for any updates to existing agency policies**

As mentioned above, this document replaces the existing USDA re-opening playbooks (for the country and for the National Capital Region). By doing so, this brings existing policies into compliance with USDA’s overall COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan. Any subsequent policy updates or building/facility-specific policy updates will be done in accordance with changes to CDC guidelines and guidance from the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force](#).
## Appendix: COVID-19 Coordination Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of expertise</th>
<th>Coordinator Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Work Desk Phone</th>
<th>Work Cell Phone</th>
<th>Work Email</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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