USDA COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan
Note: Recent changes are highlighted in yellow. This document is dynamic and will be updated as needed.

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 or local governments may provide guidance that differs from this plan. 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 to 90 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. Generally speaking, occupancy in USDA workplaces will be no more than 25% of normal occupancy during periods of significant or high community transmission. 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 will be made in areas where greater than 25% occupancy is required for mission critical work (such as laboratories or ports). 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 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. In instances where exceptions to the occupancy limit are granted, efforts will be made to adhere to CDC guidance related to masks and physical distancing.

Based on guidance from OMB (M-21-25), the 25% occupancy requirements set forth in M-21-15 will no longer be in effect once USDA has successfully completed our phased plan for reentry and post-reentry, updated our COVID-19 workplace safety plan pursuant to current CDC guidelines, satisfied any applicable collective bargaining obligations, and provided ample notice to any affected employees.

Levels of community transmission will be established by consulting CDC’s COVID Data Tracker County View. 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 will work in collaboration with USDA unions. The Office of Operations will provide occupational safety and health expertise for the National Capital Region. Mission areas will leverage their mission area capacity and will be 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 bi-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 will review draft COVID-19 workplace safety plans and protocols for USDA, make any necessary changes, and submit 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 will coordinate with GSA, building security and safety committees, and facility pandemic coordinators. We will 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 will solicit mission areas and agency input on how they would 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**

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](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/worksites/important-guidance.html) 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.

**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](https://www.cdc.gov), 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. 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).

Please note that masking is still required for fully vaccinated people in some settings such as while flying or taking public transit.

**Process for tailored plans:** The development, updating, and review of tailored facility level plans will be delegated to the agency level. USDA will require that any facility level plans be drafted by the requesting agency and submitted to the mission area pandemic coordinator within one week of dissemination of the final USDA workplace safety plan for prompt review. Those plans will be expected to cite appropriate guidance and compliance and be revised as appropriate based on feedback from the mission area pandemic coordinator before submission to the USDA COVID-19 Coordination Team and the Office of the General Counsel. All plans will be 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. Each mission area will report their results related to tailored workplace safety plans (e.g., number of plans required, number reviewed, number that required revision, etc.) to the COVID-19 Coordination Team. While agency level plans are subject to review by the USDA COVID-19 Coordination Team, afterwards, for agencies with bargaining units, the agency tailored plan will be subject to impact and implementation bargaining. Once the final plan is agreed to by the parties, as it is a labor agreement, it will then be subject to agency head review.
Vaccination Status for Employees, Contractors, and Visitors

- Vaccination Status for Employees

Consistent with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance for individuals who are fully vaccinated and those who are not fully vaccinated, USDA is establishing specific safety protocols for fully vaccinated individuals and not fully vaccinated individuals. To determine the safety protocols that each employee is required to comply with, USDA is asking employees, contractors, and visitors to complete a Certification of Vaccination form. 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).

Employees who do not attest that they are fully vaccinated or decline to submit the form are permitted entry but will be treated as unvaccinated and are required to wear a mask, maintain physically distance, and are subject to Government-wide restrictions on official travel. USDA is currently reviewing new policy guidance on weekly or twice weekly screening test requirements for onsite employees. USDA will not implement a testing program until additional guidance is available and USDA engages appropriately with agency leadership, unions, and stakeholders. These protocols are in line with the revised model safety principles from the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. Employees may submit a new Certification of Vaccination form should their vaccination status change.

Employees who are not vaccinated due to medical or religious reasons should indicate they have not been vaccinated and follow the safety protocols in place for persons not fully vaccinated. After submitting the form, they may then use the agency’s established reasonable or religious accommodation process to seek an accommodation, if necessary, related to agency safety protocols or procedures.

Only persons with a need to know will have access to an employee’s completed Certification of Vaccination form. This form 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.

While this information will provide agencies with an overview of employee vaccination status, the primary purpose of this form is to allow front-line supervisors to identify those employees who are unvaccinated, or presumed to be so by declining to respond, for purposes of ensuring compliance with the CDC guidance.

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.

- Vaccination Status for Contractors

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., FS firefighting crews; county committee meetings and executive sessions). All on-site personnel should complete the non-employee contractor/visitor vaccine certification form.

For delivery services in a large building (such as the South Building in DC), 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 one off short drop-offs in small buildings (approximately 30 minutes or less), the vaccine certification form is not required but these individuals do need to follow the masking requirements.

On-site contractors who do not attest that they are fully vaccinated or complete the form are permitted entry but must wear a mask, physically distance, and provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than the previous 3 days prior to entry to a Federal building, and are subject to Government-wide restrictions on USDA official travel. These protocols are in line with the [revised model safety principles](https://www.saferforce.gsa.gov/revised-model-safety-principles) from the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. On-site contractors should complete the [Certification of Vaccination form](https://www.saferforce.gsa.gov) 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 anyone who is not a USDA employee or a contractor and includes groups such as: volunteers, onsite grantees, cooperators and stakeholders. Visitors should complete this [form](https://www.saferforce.gsa.gov) 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.
Visitors who are not fully vaccinated or who decline to provide information about their vaccination status are permitted entry but must wear a mask, physically distance, and 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 a customer refuses to comply with USDA’s safety protocols, USDA employees can considerably 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

USDA will await guidance from the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force about a testing plan for the USDA workforce. CDC testing guidance can be found here.

Contact Tracing

USDA’s COVID-19 Coordination Team will collaborate with and support 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 will implement infection control and workplace safety efforts once informed of a 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 will 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 for Official Business**

To protect employee health and safety, employees should continue to limit official travel to mission critical activities, regardless of vaccination status. 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). 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.

USDA employees who have not been vaccinated should be aware that they may be required to stay at home for a period of time after official travel before they are allowed to return to the workplace, as well as following any testing guidance once issued. Employees will be notified by their supervisor if they are required to stay at home. 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 be asked to complete symptom screening (such as a symptom questionnaire, an exposure history questionnaire, or a temperature check), on a daily basis or upon entry to the workplace. 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.

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 receive 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.

As mentioned above, based on guidance from OMB (M-21-25), the 25% occupancy requirements set forth in M-21-15 will no longer be in effect once USDA has successfully completed our phased plan for reentry and post-reentry, updated our COVID-19 workplace safety plan pursuant to current CDC guidelines, satisfied any applicable collective bargaining obligations, and provided ample notice to any affected employees.

**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.

**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. 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 will 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 will be 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 will 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. 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 will be shared with the unions that have National Consultation Rights for feedback and input on implementation. Similarly, each USDA agency will share the safety plan with their respective union(s). This feedback will guide 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](https://www.saferfederalworkforce.gov/).
## 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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