

## USDA COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan

USDA's mission is to provide critical services for curbing poverty and hunger, make credit available for rural development (where approximately 20% of Americans live), stabilize or improve domestic farm income, manage the integrity of critical natural resources, ensure the quality of food supplies, develop markets for agricultural products and services, and sustain the productivity of the Nation's forests, grasslands, and natural resources. Accordingly, this USDA Workplace Safety Plan was created in response to:

- Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-21-25, COVID-19 Safe Federal Workplace: [Agency Model Safety Principles](#) (September 13, 2021),
- Executive Order [13991](#), Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing (January 20, 2021), a part of the National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness, and
- It continues to be updated based on evolving guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), guidance from other agencies, such as the General Services Administration (GSA) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and the [Safer Federal Workforce Taskforce](#).

USDA created this workplace safety plan to guide how Mission Areas, Agencies, and Staff Offices should implement public health best practices as determined by the CDC. As we have done since the start of the pandemic, USDA is working 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, contractors, and the public is paramount.

State, local, commonwealth, territorial, 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 USDA facilities and on USDA land in that locality. USDA aims to be a partner in our communities to stop the spread of COVID-19.

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<b>Topics in this workplace safety plan:</b>	

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

### **Telework and Remote Work**

USDA is complying with [Departmental Directive 4080-811-002 \(November 22, 2021\)](#), *Telework and Remote Work Programs*.

### **COVID-19 Coordination Team**

USDA has established a COVID-19 Coordination Team. The team includes:

- Executive Leadership
- Public Health Expertise
- Office of Human Resources Management
- Office of General Counsel
- Representatives from Mission Areas and Staff Offices

The team meets regularly to review agency COVID-19 workplace safety plans and protocols, consider potential revisions to agency COVID-19 workplace safety plans and protocols pursuant to guidance from the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force and current CDC guidelines, and evaluate any other operational needs related to COVID-19 workplace safety. The team coordinates with the Office of Operations which provides occupational safety and health for the National Capital Region and the Office of Property and Environmental Management which oversees facility management across USDA. Through USDA's monthly Labor Management Forum, the Coordination Team engages regularly with USDA's national unions.

### **Face Masks and other PPE**

The CDC has set recommendations related to [COVID-19 Community Levels](#), which measure the impact of COVID-19 illness on health and healthcare systems. USDA uses COVID-19 Community Levels, as determined by CDC, in determining the appropriate prevention strategies to utilize at a given time, including as it relates to mask-wearing and follows the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance](#).

### **All individuals can wear a mask if they choose regardless of COVID-19 Community Level.**

Based on the county Community Level, USDA facility masking protocols is as follows:

Where the COVID-19 Community Level is **LOW** in the county where a USDA facility or employee worksite is located: Individuals are not required to wear masks in the facility or worksite, regardless of vaccination status and consistent with CDC and Safer Federal Workforce Task Force (Task Force) guidance on mask-wearing.

Where the COVID-19 Community Level is **MEDIUM** in the county where a USDA facility or employee worksite is located: Individuals are not required to wear masks in the facility or worksite, regardless of vaccination status and consistent with CDC and Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance on mask-wearing.

Where the COVID-19 Community Level is **HIGH** in the county where a USDA facility or employee worksite is located: Individuals are required to wear masks in the facility or worksite, regardless of vaccination status and consistent with CDC and Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance on mask-wearing.

Employees who perform official duties in more than one county must follow protocols for the county they are in. In other words, an employee is required to wear a mask while working in a facility or worksite in a county where the COVID-19 Community Level is **HIGH**, but that same employee is not required to wear a mask while working in a different facility or worksite on the same day in a county where the COVID-19 Community Level is **LOW** or **MEDIUM**.

Where a locality imposes more protective pandemic-related safety requirements, those requirements must be followed in USDA facilities or employee worksites within that locality.

People with COVID-like symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to someone with COVID-19 must wear a mask for the required period consistent with [CDC](#) and [Task Force](#) guidance for quarantine and isolation.

The Community Level designations are provided to Mission Areas and Staff Offices Leadership and Pandemic Coordinators on Fridays to direct mask-wearing protocols for the following week (Sunday through Saturday). The data is also provided to employees in the “Big 3” updates for the week.

If any employee is unable to wear a mask properly, [CDC guidance](#) should be considered. Accommodations are made for individuals with required documentation and should be in accordance with existing USDA and Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) guidance.

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

Visitors are expected to follow CDC guidance related to [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) for mask wearing and physical distancing in USDA or USDA leased facilities. If a visitor or customer refuses to comply with USDA’s safety protocols, USDA employees should considerately make visitors and customers aware of the masking requirement when masking is required by the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance](#). Visitors and customers who do not honor USDA’s requirement should be asked, politely, to do so. If the visitor or 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. Visitors and customers who do not honor USDA’s requirement should be asked, politely, to do so. If the visitor or 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.

## Vaccination Status and Safety Protocols for Employees, Contractors, and Visitors

### Vaccination Status for Employees

On January 21, 2022, in the judicial action of *Feds for Medical Freedom, et al. v. Biden, et al.*, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas issued an Order temporarily enjoining the implementation and enforcement of [Executive Order 14043](#), which required COVID-19 vaccination for federal employees. The Department of Justice (“DOJ”) appealed the preliminary injunction to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, but the preliminary injunction remains in place at this time. USDA continues to encourage everyone to get a COVID-19 vaccination and booster shot if they have not already to protect themselves, their children and loved ones.

“Fully vaccinated” means a person has received all recommended doses in their primary series of COVID-19 vaccine.

“Up to date” means a person has received all recommended doses in their primary series COVID-19 vaccine, and a booster dose when eligible.

In most circumstances, the agency authorizes employees to take up to four hours of administrative leave to travel to the vaccination site, complete any vaccination dose or booster shot, and return to work. For example, up to eight hours of administrative leave for employees receiving two doses. If an employee needs to spend less time getting the vaccine, only the needed amount of administrative leave should be granted. Additional time may be granted for extenuating circumstances such as the distance to the vaccination site. Employees may only receive administrative leave during their normal work hours, should request and seek approval in advance, and may not receive administrative leave or overtime work for time spent getting a vaccine or booster shot outside their tour of duty.

Employees receive paid time off to address any side effects for the vaccination or booster. Administrative leave of up to two days is authorized if any employee has an adverse reaction to a COVID-19 vaccination dose that prevents the employee from working (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 this guidance and answer any specific questions the employee might have.

Employees also receive up to four hours of administrative leave per dose to accompany a family member being vaccinated. Employees should obtain advance approval from their supervisor before being permitted to use administrative leave to accompany a family member who is receiving a COVID-19 vaccination or booster shot. Employees are not credited with administrative leave or overtime work for time spent outside their tour of duty helping a family member get vaccinated.

All vaccinated employees, even if they have previously attested to their vaccination status, are encouraged to provide proof of vaccination, including booster shots, to enable the Agency to determine the applicable safety protocols for each employee to protect the health and safety of our workforce by limiting the exposure to COVID-19. Proof of vaccination means a copy of the record of immunization from a health care provider or pharmacy, a copy of the COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card, a copy of medical records documenting the vaccination, a copy of immunization records from a public health or state immunization information system, or a copy of

any other official documentation or verification containing required data points (the document submitted must identify the type of vaccine administered, date(s) of administration, and the name of the health care professional(s) or clinic site(s) administering the vaccine(s)). Employees must certify under penalty of perjury that the documentation they are submitting is true and correct.

Employees may provide a digital copy including, for example, a digital photograph, scanned image, or PDF of such a record that clearly and legibly displays the information outlined above.

Employees may submit proof of vaccination, including booster shots, by clicking [here \(restricted to USDA employees\)](#). Employees should contact their supervisor with questions about submitting proof of vaccination.

Only persons with a need to know have access to an employee's vaccine verification information. The documentation is held in accordance with all applicable laws, including the Privacy Act and Rehabilitation Act of 1973. 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.

When requesting that employees, onsite contractor employees, and visitors voluntarily provide this vaccination information, the agency: (1) complies with any applicable Federal laws, including requirements under the Privacy Act and the Paperwork Reduction Act, and any applicable collective bargaining obligations; (2) takes steps to promote privacy and IT security, while also providing the relevant information to those who need to know in order to implement the safety protocols; (3) consults with its Agency Records Officer, Chief Information Officer, and Senior Agency Official for Privacy to determine the best means to maintain this information to meet the agency's needs; and (4) only disseminates this vaccination information to the appropriate agency officials who have a need to know to ensure effective implementation of the safety protocols, which, in many cases, includes the supervisor level.

When an employee discloses that they are not fully vaccinated or declines to provide their vaccination status to USDA, or until USDA knows the vaccination status of an employee, the employee must follow the protocols for an individual who is **not fully vaccinated**. Employees who do not submit proof of the recommended booster in the Proof of Vaccination Survey will not be considered up to date with COVID-19 vaccines and may be required to follow different safety protocols.

To ensure compliance with the January 21, 2022, preliminary nationwide injunction, USDA is pausing all adjudications of employees' medical or religious accommodation requests related to the vaccine mandate. Not fully vaccinated employees do not need an exception to the vaccine mandate so long as the nationwide preliminary injunction is in place. Not fully vaccinated employees are required to comply with all other COVID-19 safety protocols for not fully vaccinated employees consistent with the [USDA COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan](#).

To ensure compliance with the January 21, 2022, preliminary nationwide injunction, USDA will take no action to implement or enforce the COVID-19 vaccination requirement pursuant to E.O. 14043. Therefore, so long as the nationwide preliminary injunction is in place, all enforcement actions are paused, including any reply periods contained in an employee's Notice of Proposed Suspension and any decision on an employee's Proposed Suspension. At this time,

enforcement actions associated with the COVID-19 vaccination requirement pursuant to E.O. 14043 that were already effectuated prior to the nationwide injunction remain in place. For example, the Agency will not repeal, rescind, or revoke letters of education and counseling, cautions, or proposals of suspensions.

### **Vaccination Status and Other Safety Protocols for Contractor Employees**

Pursuant to [Executive Order 14042](#) on Ensuring Adequate COVID Safety Protocols for Federal Contractors, as well as the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force's guidance and Frequently Asked Questions for Federal contractors and subcontractors, and in addition to any requirements or workplace safety protocols that are applicable because a covered contractor or subcontractor employee is present at a Federal workplace, Federal contractors and subcontractors with a covered contract for construction or services above the simplified acquisition threshold are required to comply with all guidance, including guidance conveyed through Frequently Asked Questions, as amended during the performance of their contract, for contractor or subcontractor workplace locations published by the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force at <https://www.saferfederalworkforce.gov/contractors/>.

In implementing Executive Order 14042, the Department will comply with all relevant court orders, including by following relevant OMB and Safer Federal Workforce Task Force [guidance](#).

That guidance includes details regarding the following workplace safety protocols:

- All individuals, including covered contractor employees and visitors, must comply with the Guidance related to [Masking and Physical Distancing](#) and providing proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test within the past 3 days, while in covered contractor workplaces.
- [Designation of a Point Person or Persons](#) to coordinate COVID-19 workplace safety efforts at covered contractor workplaces.

A "contractor", for purposes of this section, is defined as a contractor employee performing a procurement contract providing goods or services for the direct use of the Federal government that is governed by the Federal Acquisition Regulation or performing work under a contract-like instrument, on-site.

"Onsite" contractors may include contractor personnel 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).

For existing contracts or contract-like instruments (hereinafter "contracts") that contain a clause implementing requirements of Executive Order 14042, USDA will take no action to enforce the clause implementing requirements of Executive Order 14042, mandating vaccination, where the place of performance identified in the contract is in [a U.S. state or outlying area subject to a court order prohibiting the application of vaccine requirements pursuant to the Executive Order](#).

When required by the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance](#), agencies should ask about the vaccination status of contractor employees working onsite at that facility. Onsite contractor

employees should attest to the truthfulness of the response they provide. If an onsite contractor employee chooses not to provide a response, they should be treated as not fully vaccinated for the purpose of agency safety protocols. In requesting this information, agencies should comply with any applicable Federal laws, including requirements under the Privacy Act and the Paperwork Reduction Act.

When the Agency is required by the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance](#) to ask about vaccination status, onsite contractor employees who are not fully vaccinated or who decline to provide information about their vaccination status should be able to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from within the previous 3 days when in that facility. If a contractor employee is regularly tested pursuant to an agency testing program, then they do not need to be able to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from within the previous 3 days when in a Federal facility unless required to by the agency testing program.

When the Agency is required by the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance](#) to ask about vaccination status, onsite contractor employees should be provided with the [Certification of Vaccination form](#) when they enter that facility.

Unless an agency has an existing system of records notice that permits it to collect and maintain this information on its contractor employees, agencies should direct onsite contractor employees to complete the Certification of Vaccination form and keep it with them during their time on Federal premises—they may be asked to show the form when in the Federal facility and to a Federal employee who oversees their work.

When the Agency is required by the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance](#) to ask about vaccination status,, onsite contractor employees who are not fully vaccinated (or who decline to disclose their vaccination status) should be able to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test result from within the previous 3 days when in that facility.

Agencies may email the Certification of Vaccination form to contractor employees in advance of their time on-site or utilize a tool or application to share the form with contractor employees and enable them to easily complete it. Any such collection, storage, or maintenance of the attestation disclosure forms may implicate the Privacy Act and Paperwork Reduction Act.

When required pursuant to the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidelines, onsite contractor employees must attest to the truthfulness of the responses they provide by completing the Certification of Vaccination form and emailing it in advance to their USDA point of contact or be prepared to show it upon entry. If a contractor is unable to complete the form in advance, a paper copy of the form will be available at the building entrances and must be completed and submitted to their USDA point of contact upon entry.

On-site contractors can use a previously used form if there is no change in vaccination status. Host agency personnel may keep a list of regular onsite contractor employees who have certified they are fully vaccinated. Onsite contractor employees 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 earlier than 3 days prior upon arrival to their host and not emailed in advance. Of note, it is 3 days from when the test was taken (not 3 days from when the results became available). Contractor employees who are regularly tested pursuant to an agency screening



testing program do not need to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than 3 days when in a Federal building unless required by the agency testing program.

When certification of vaccination of contractor employees is being requested, USDA should email the Certification of Vaccination form to contractor employees in advance of their time onsite or utilize a unique tool or application to share the form with contractor employees and enable them to easily complete it. For those onsite contractor employees who do not have access to email or applications, USDA has determined the best method of distribution, including by having printed copies of the form at the entry point to the worksite.

### **Vaccination Status for Visitors and Customers**

**Individuals entering a federal building, federally controlled indoor worksite, or federal land to obtain a public service or benefit do not need to complete the form or show documentation of a negative COVID-19 test result.** However, they must comply with all relevant CDC guidance and safety protocols, including mask-wearing and physical distancing requirements.

A visitor is defined as anyone who is not a USDA employee or a contractor and includes categories such as: volunteers, retirees, people with appointments with the agency, and stakeholders. When required pursuant to the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidelines](#) (currently COVID Medium and High Community levels only), visitors are expected to complete the Certification of Vaccination form and email it in advance to their USDA point of contact or be prepared to show it upon entry. If a visitor is unable to complete the form in advance, a copy will be available at the building entrances and must be completed and submitted to your USDA point of contact upon entry.

It is the responsibility of the host agency (including in multi-tenant buildings) to collect all verification of vaccination forms and visually confirm test results, as appropriate, and ensure it is following the appropriate COVID safety protocols. Agencies should do this in a way that makes the 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 when it is required by the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance](#), will be required provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than the previous 3 days which must be presented upon arrival to your host and not emailed in advance.

### **Testing**

The CDC has set recommendations related to [COVID-19 Community Levels](#), which measure the impact of COVID-19 illness on health and healthcare systems. USDA uses COVID-19 Community Levels, as determined by CDC, in determining the appropriate prevention strategies to utilize at a given time, including as it relates to testing.

Employees who have not submitted proof that they are fully vaccinated are required to enroll in their Agency's screening testing program. Employees enrolled in the screening testing program

will be tested each week when required pursuant the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance](#).


USDA is also establishing a process for employee diagnostic testing after a workplace exposure. Federal employees who have been exposed to persons with COVID-19 at work will receive diagnostic testing at no cost to the employee. More information on that process is forthcoming.

USDA's testing program guidance will provide further details once finalized.

### 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).

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 and onsite contractors who were in the USDA workplace within 3 days of either symptom onset or a positive COVID test, **must** report it via this  [form](#).

If they are too sick to complete the form, the supervisor should work with them to gather the information. Employees who remain on maximized telework and have not come into a USDA workspace may report a COVID-19 positive result. On the form, individuals should also identify close contacts within 3 days of either symptom onset or a positive COVID test. A [close contact](#) is defined as being within 6 feet of someone who has [probable](#) or confirmed COVID-19 for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. The completed form will be shared with the Pandemic Coordinator or designee who is responsible for conducting the contact tracing. The Pandemic Coordinator or their designee is responsible for the coordination of cleaning (as described below) and the notification of close contacts, as needed.

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 or follow your Agency/Mission Area protocol for positive test reporting. USDA will remain 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

Travel restrictions have been lifted for domestic travel to counties within the United States and its territories with a **LOW** or **MEDIUM** COVID-19 Community Level. However, only mission critical travel is permissible to counties with a **HIGH** COVID-19 Community Level to protect employee

health and safety, all employees, regardless of vaccination status. Managers must assess whether travel to a county with a **HIGH** COVID-19 Community Level meets the mission critical requirements. Mission critical refers to activities necessary for the ongoing operation of the Department and its programs which cannot be performed remotely.

In limited circumstances where official travel is involved, agencies may assign work based on an employee's vaccination status where the quarantine requirements for not fully vaccinated individuals in the destination locale would negatively impact the not fully vaccinated employee's ability to perform the assignment.

Official international travel should be limited to mission critical (e.g., military deployments, COVID-19 response deployments/activities, diplomats traveling, high-level international negotiations that cannot occur remotely) until further notice. USDA follows guidance from the Department of State regarding USDA employees at overseas duty stations, including possible vaccination requirements in the country being visited, which are not subject to the injunction.

**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. USDA employees traveling for official business should adhere to [CDC guidelines on travel](#). The CDC has extensive guidelines for both domestic and international travel, and federal workers should consult these resources carefully before deciding to travel.

If an employee is required to quarantine after work-related travel and unable to work, including unable to telework, agencies may grant weather and safety leave while the employee is required to quarantine. The number of days of weather and safety leave that may be granted is based on the current Safer Federal Workforce [Quarantine and Isolation](#) guidance for the number of days an employee should quarantine. If an employee is required to isolate for probable or confirmed COVID-19 and is unable to work, including unable to telework, the employee may request sick leave, annual leave, credit hours, compensatory time off, advanced annual/sick, Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) leave, or leave without pay (LWOP). Weather and safety leave may not be granted. To mitigate close contacts in the workplace, agencies may grant up to 3 days of administrative leave if an employee has COVID-19 symptoms and is isolating while actively seeking to be tested.

### **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.

Administrative leave may be authorized for employees who are required to quarantine and cannot telework.

## Symptom Monitoring

If USDA employees, onsite contractors, or visitors have [symptoms](#) consistent with COVID-19, they should not enter the USDA workplace, worksite or interact with other employees or the public. Any individual with probable or confirmed COVID-19, regardless of their vaccination status, should isolate at home, consistent with CDC recommendations on [isolation](#) and workplace safety protocols. This includes people who have a [positive viral test](#) for COVID-19, regardless of whether or not they have symptoms, and people with symptoms of COVID-19, including people who are awaiting test results or have not been tested. People with [symptoms](#) should isolate even if they are not aware of having close contact with someone with COVID-19. Any individual who develops any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 during the workday must immediately wear a mask (regardless of the COVID-19 Community Level of the county in which they work), notify their supervisor, promptly leave the workplace and isolate consistent with CDC recommendations on [isolation](#) and workplace safety protocols. USDA has processes in place to provide advice and support to supervisors on any related reporting or HR requirements.

Employees and onsite contractors who were in the USDA workplace within 3 days of either symptom onset or a positive COVID test, **must** report it via this  [form](#).

## Quarantine and Isolation

### Quarantine – if you were in close contact with someone who has COVID-19.

*According to CDC guidance, close contact is defined as being within 6 feet from an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinical diagnosis) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.*

Per CDC guidance, if you were exposed to COVID-19 and are **NOT** up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations, you must **quarantine (stay at home)** for at least 5 days, wear a mask around others and don't travel. Even if you don't have symptoms, you should get tested at least 5 days after close contact. Watch for symptoms for 10 full days after you had close contact with someone with COVID-19. Individuals who are **NOT** up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations should also take precautions for 10 full days from the date of their close contact with someone with COVID-19, including wearing a mask around others. If an individual is unable to wear a mask, then they should quarantine for 10 days. If you develop symptoms, isolate immediately, get tested and follow isolation recommendations.

If you were exposed to COVID-19 and are [up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccines](#), including recommended [booster shots](#) and [additional primary shots](#) for some immunocompromised people, you do not need to quarantine unless you develop symptoms. If you develop symptoms, isolate immediately, get tested and follow isolation recommendations. Even if you don't have symptoms, get tested at least 5 days after close contact. If you tested positive,

isolate from other people, and follow isolation recommendations. Individuals who are up to date with COVID-19 vaccines should still watch for symptoms for 10 full days after their last close contact with someone with COVID-19. Such individuals should also take precautions for 10 full days from the date of their last close contact with someone with COVID-19, including wearing a mask around others for 10 days. If an individual is unable to wear a mask, then they should quarantine for 10 days.

If you were exposed to COVID-19 and had confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days (that is, you tested positive using a [viral test](#)), you do not need to quarantine unless you develop symptoms. However, you should still watch for symptoms for 10 full days after you had close contact with someone with COVID-19. Individuals who had had confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days should also take precautions for 10 full days from the date they had close contact with someone with COVID-19, including wearing a mask around others for 10 days after the close contact. If an individual is unable to wear a mask, then they should quarantine for 10 days. If you develop symptoms isolate immediately and get tested and follow isolation recommendations.

USDA employees who are required to quarantine and cannot work from home may be authorized administrative leave.


In rare instances where individuals are unable to quarantine due to significant operational considerations, such as the nature of the employee's work, the agency should consult with their COVID-19 Coordination Team and the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. Generally, in these rare instances, those employees who would otherwise quarantine would instead take other precautions for 10 full days from the date they last had close contact with someone with COVID-19, including wearing a [well-fitting mask](#) when around others and, to the extent possible, avoiding eating and drinking around others, avoiding environments such as dining facilities and gyms where they may be unmasked around others, avoiding people who are [immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease](#), and avoiding nursing homes and other high-risk settings.

### **Isolation- if you have symptoms or tested positive for COVID-19, even if you don't have symptoms.**

People who are in isolation should stay home until it's safe for them to be around others. At home, anyone sick or infected should separate from others, or wear a [well-fitting mask](#) when they need to be around others.

Any individual (employee or contractor) with probable or confirmed COVID-19, regardless of their vaccination status, should isolate at home for 5 days, consistent with CDC [recommendations](#) on [isolation](#) and monitor their symptoms. This includes people who have a [positive viral test](#) for COVID-19, regardless of whether or not they have symptoms, and people with symptoms of COVID-19, including people who are awaiting test results or have not been tested. People with [symptoms](#) should isolate even if they do not know if they have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19.

USDA employees who are required to isolate and cannot work from home may take hours of administrative leave.

Employees and contractors who were in the USDA workplace within 3 days of a positive COVID test, **must** report it via this  [form](#). If an employee or onsite contractor is too sick to complete the form, the supervisor should work with them to gather the information. 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.

Personnel who have had a close contact—defined as being within 6 feet from an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinical diagnosis) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period—should follow CDC and local and Tribal guidance for quarantine.

Individuals who had COVID-19 and had [symptoms](#) can end their isolation after 5 full days from the onset of symptoms if they are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication, their other symptoms have improved, and they have met any agency testing requirements. Note that loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation. Those individuals who end their isolation after 5 full days should continue to wear a mask around others for an additional 5 days.

Individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 and never developed symptoms can end isolation after 5 full days after their positive COVID-19 test, assuming they have not developed symptoms and comply with any agency testing requirements. Such an individual should continue to wear a mask around others for an additional 5 days after the end of their 5-day isolation. If they develop symptoms at any point, they should start a 5-day isolation period over, with day 0 being their first day of symptoms.

Under OSHA's recordkeeping requirements, if an employee tests positive for SARS-CoV-2 infection, the case must be recorded on the OSHA Illness and Injury Log if each of the following conditions are met: (1) the case is a confirmed case of COVID-19; (2) the case is work-related (as defined by 29 CFR 1904.5); and (3) the case involves one or more relevant recording criteria (set forth in 29 CFR 1904.7) (e.g., medical treatment beyond first aid, days away from work). USDA agency follows state and county reporting requirements and complies with state and county contact tracing efforts.

If an employee is required to isolate for probable or confirmed COVID-19 and is unable to telework, the employee may request sick leave, accrued annual leave, or other forms of earned paid time off (e.g., compensatory time off or credit hours) or unpaid leave in this situation, as appropriate. Weather and safety leave would generally be unavailable, but to mitigate close contacts in the workplace, agencies may on a limited basis offer up to 3 days of administrative

leave to employees who have COVID-19 symptoms and are isolating while actively seeking to be tested. See CPM 2020-02, February 7, 2020.

If quarantine of an employee is required to quarantine after official travel or a close contact while on duty and is unable to telework, the employee should receive administrative leave while the employee is quarantined.

If an employee with probable or confirmed COVID-19 attempts to report to the workplace before the completion of the required isolation period, the employee may be directed to return home and telework or, if the employee is unable to telework, use weather and safety leave other leave entitlements.

### **Confidentiality**

All medical information collected from personnel, including vaccine status, test results and any other information obtained because of testing and symptom monitoring, is treated confidentially in accordance with applicable law, and accessible only by those with a need to know to protect the health and safety of personnel.

USDA takes steps to promote privacy and IT security, while also providing the relevant information to agency officials who need to know to implement the safety protocols. USDA consults, as appropriate, with its Agency Records Officer, Chief Information Officer, Chief Medical Officer, Senior Agency Official for Privacy, and agency legal counsel to determine appropriate information management protocols.

### **Meetings, Conferences, and Events**

In counties where the COVID-19 Community Level is **HIGH**, any meeting, conference or event that is attended by more than 50 in-person participants requires approval by the agency head, in consultation with USDA's COVID Safety Team. This approval process only applies for agency hosted events and includes both indoor and outdoor events. Any meeting, conference or event can be submitted for approval to [sradvisorcovid@usda.gov](mailto:sradvisorcovid@usda.gov)

When required pursuant to the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidelines](#), in-person attendees at any meeting, conference, or event hosted by USDA, regardless of size, must be asked to provide information about vaccination status. In requesting this information, USDA complies 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 at any meeting, conference, or event hosted by USDA in a county with a **HIGH** COVID-19 Community Level must wear a mask in public indoor settings regardless of vaccination status.

## Physical Distancing

To the extent practicable, individuals are 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 when doing so is required by the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance](#). Reconfiguration of workspaces or office assignments, and other mitigation strategies have been implemented to minimize interactions.

Occupancy limits are no longer in effect. However, agencies may establish occupancy limits for specific workspaces or workplaces as a means of ensuring physical distancing.

## Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection

USDA follows [CDC guidance on cleaning and disinfecting a facility](#). This includes routine cleaning and when someone is sick or has tested positive for COVID-19 and has been in a USDA facility within the last 24 hours.

## Hygiene

Hand sanitizer stations are available at the building entrance and throughout workspaces. Personnel are 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 are also 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 has been optimized to increase the proportion of outdoor ventilation, improve filtration, and reduce or eliminate recirculation. Additional modifications may be considered in accordance with [CDC guidance](#) and the [Clean Air in Buildings Challenge](#), including as percent occupancy increases.

## **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 Onsite Contractors

USDA has deployed the [Future of Work website](#) for employees to provide ongoing COVID-19 information and resources. 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 safety protocols and CDC guidance. 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.



## **External Communication**

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 (e.g., wearing a mask indoors). 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 leverages the USDA Labor Management Forum to share COVID-19 related updates including changes to the USDA Workplace Safety Plan. USDA will continue to comply with its labor obligations in the implementation of USDA's COVID-19 safety plan.

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

As mentioned above, this document is established as the governing Workplace Safety Plan for USDA's COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness and supersedes previously issued USDA guidance documents and 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 are done in accordance with changes to CDC guidelines and guidance from the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force](#).

## **Leased and Shared Facilities**

In a GSA leased facility, the GSA facility manager is responsible for ensuring mask signage is prominently displayed when Community Levels are High and that employees, visitors, contractors, and the public adhere to the mask requirement. GSA is also responsible for ensuring visitors and contractors show proof of a negative covid test within three days or attest to their vaccination status. Mission Areas who lease facilities outside of the GSA must review their lease agreements and determine responsibilities for communicating and enforcing the mask and contractor/visitor testing requirements.

In a shared facility with another Federal Department, the host agency's Workplace Safety Plan will be followed. If there are significant differences with the host agency and the USDA Workplace Safety Plan, Mission Agencies should elevate the concern to their Pandemic Coordinator.

In all cases, it is the Mission Agencies' responsibility to ensure their eligible employees are tested. This does not prevent eligible USDA employees from participating in an on-site hosted testing program however, those employees must still report positive covid test cases up to the USDA SharePoint site.