

Commonly Asked Q&A About COVID-19
Provided by the City of Shreveport Departments of Human Resources
and
Finance Administration
(Revised 3/27/2020)



Coronavirus Disease Basics

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov))

Q: What is a novel coronavirus?

A: A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is not the same as the [coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans](#) and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

A diagnosis with coronavirus 229E, NL63, OC43, or HKU1 is not the same as a COVID-19 diagnosis. Patients with COVID-19 will be evaluated and cared for differently than patients with common coronavirus diagnosis.

Q: How does the virus spread?

A: This virus was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The first infections were linked to a live animal market, but the virus is now spreading from person-to-person. It's important to note that person-to-person spread can happen on a continuum. Some viruses are highly contagious (like measles), while other viruses are less so.

The virus that causes COVID-19 seems to be spreading easily and sustainably in the community ("community spread") in [some affected geographic areas](#). Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected.

Q: Can someone who has had COVID-19 spread the illness to others?

A: The virus that causes COVID-19 is [spreading from person-to-person](#). Someone who is actively sick with COVID-19 can spread the illness to others. That is why CDC recommends that these patients be isolated either in the hospital or at home (depending on how sick they are) until they are better and no longer pose a risk of infecting others.

How long someone is actively sick can vary so the decision on when to release someone from isolation is made on a case-by-case basis in consultation with doctors, infection prevention and control experts, and public health officials and involves considering specifics of each situation

including disease severity, illness signs and symptoms, and results of laboratory testing for that patient.

Current [CDC guidance for when it is OK to release someone from isolation](#) is made on a case by case basis and includes meeting all of the following requirements:

- The patient is free from fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- The patient is no longer showing symptoms, including cough.
- The patient has tested negative on at least two consecutive respiratory specimens collected at least 24 hours apart.

Someone who has been released from isolation is not considered to pose a risk of infection to others.

Q: Can someone who has been quarantined for Covid-19 spread the illness to others?

A: Quarantine means separating a person or group of people who have been exposed to a contagious disease but have not developed illness (symptoms) from others who have not been exposed, in order to prevent the possible spread of that disease. Quarantine is usually established for the incubation period of the communicable disease, which is the span of time during which people have developed illness after exposure. For COVID-19, the period of quarantine is 14 days from the last date of exposure, because 14 days is the longest incubation period seen for similar coronaviruses. Someone who has been released from COVID-19 quarantine is not considered a risk for spreading the virus to others because they have not developed illness during the incubation period.

Q: Who is at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19?

A: Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19. These people who may be at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness, includes:

- Older adults
- People who have serious underlying medical conditions like:
 - Heart disease
 - Diabetes
 - Lung disease

Q: What should people at higher risk of serious illness with COVID-19 do?

A: If you are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19, you should: stock up on supplies; take everyday precautions to keep space between yourself and others; when you go out in public, keep away from others who are sick; limit close contact and wash your hands often; and avoid crowds, cruise travel, and non-essential travel. If there is an outbreak in your community, stay home as much as possible. Watch for symptoms and emergency signs. If you get sick, stay home and call your doctor. More information on how to prepare, what to do if you get sick, and how

communities and caregivers can support those at higher risk is available on [People at Risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19](#).

Q: Does CDC recommend the use of facemask to prevent COVID-19?

A: CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. You should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it. A facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms. This is to protect others from the risk of getting infected. The use of facemasks also is crucial for [health workers](#) and other [people who are taking care of someone infected with COVID-19 in close settings](#) (at home or in a health care facility).

Q: What should I do if there is an outbreak in my community?

A: During an outbreak, stay calm and put your preparedness plan to work. Follow the steps below:

Protect yourself and others.

- Stay home if you are sick. Keep away from people who are sick. Limit close contact with others as much as possible (about 6 feet).

Put your household plan into action.

- Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation. Be aware of temporary school dismissals in your area, as this may affect your household's daily routine.
- Continue practicing everyday preventive actions. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains 60% alcohol. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily using a regular household detergent and water.
- Notify your workplace as soon as possible if your regular work schedule changes. Ask to work from home or take leave if you or someone in your household gets sick with [COVID-19 symptoms](#), or if your child's school is dismissed temporarily. [Learn how businesses and employers can plan for and respond to COVID-19](#).
- Stay in touch with others by phone or email. If you have a chronic medical condition and live alone, ask family, friends, and health care providers to check on you during an outbreak. Stay in touch with family and friends, especially those at increased risk of developing severe illness, such as older adults and people with severe chronic medical conditions.

Q: What are the symptoms and complications that COVID-19 can cause?

A: Current symptoms reported for patients with COVID-19 have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

COVID-19 and the Fair Labor Standards Act

Source: U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division
(<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/flsa/pandemic>)

Q: If an employer directs salaried, exempt employees to take vacation (or leave bank deductions) or leave without pay during office closures due to influenza, pandemic, or other public health emergency, does this impact the employee's exempt status?

A: Exempt, salaried employees generally must receive their full salary in any week in which they perform any work, subject to certain very limited exceptions. The FLSA does not require employer-provided vacation time. Where an employer offers a bona fide benefits plan or vacation time to its employees, there is no prohibition on an employer requiring that such accrued leave or vacation time be taken on a specific day(s). Further, this will not affect the employee's salary basis of payment so long as the employee still receives in payment an amount equal to the employee's guaranteed salary. However, an employee will not be considered paid "on a salary basis" if deductions from the predetermined compensation are made for absences occasioned by the office closure during a week in which the employee performs any work. Exempt salaried employees are not required to be paid their salary in weeks in which they perform no work.

Q: What are an employer's obligations to an employee who is under government-imposed quarantine?

A: WHD encourages employers to be accommodating and flexible with workers impacted by government-imposed quarantines. Employers may offer alternative work arrangements, such as teleworking, and additional paid time off to such employees.

Q: May an employer encourage or require employees to telework (i.e., work from an alternative location such as home) as an infection control strategy?

A: Yes. An employer may encourage or require employees to telework as an infection-control or prevention strategy, including based on timely information from public health authorities about pandemics, public health emergencies, or other similar conditions. Telework also may be a reasonable accommodation.

Of course, employers must not single out employees either to telework or to continue reporting to the workplace on a basis prohibited by any of the EEO laws. (See the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's publication, [Work at Home/Telework as a Reasonable Accommodation](#), for additional information.)

Q: Do employers have to pay employees their same hourly rate or salary if they work at home?

A: If telework is being provided as a reasonable accommodation for a qualified individual with a disability, or if required by a union or employment contract, then you must pay the same hourly rate or salary.

If this is not the case and you do not have a union contract or other employment contracts, under the FLSA employers generally have to pay employees only for the hours they actually work, whether at home or at the employer's office. However, the FLSA requires employers to pay non-exempt workers at least the minimum wage for all hours worked, and at least time and one half the regular rate of pay for hours worked in excess of 40 in a workweek. Salaried exempt employees generally must receive their full salary in any week in which they perform any work, subject to certain very limited exceptions.

If the Service Contract Act (SCA) or state or local laws regulating the payment of wages also apply, nothing in the FLSA or its regulations or interpretations overrides or nullifies any higher standards provided by such other laws or authority. (See the U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division for additional information on the SCA or call 1-866-487-9243.)

Q: In the event an organization bars employees from working from their current place of business and requires them to work at home, will employers have to pay those employees who are unable to work from home?

A: Under the FLSA, employers generally only have to pay employees for the hours they actually work, whether at home or at the employer's office. However, employers must pay at least the minimum wage for all hours worked, and at least time and one half the regular rate of pay for hours worked in excess of 40 in a workweek. Salaried exempt employees must receive their full salary in any week in which they perform any work, subject to certain very limited exceptions. (See the U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division for additional information or call 1-866-487-9243 if you have questions.)

When not all employees can work from home, we encourage you to consider additional options to promote social distancing, such as staggered work shifts.

Q: Do OSHA's regulations and standards apply to the home office? Are there any other Federal laws employers need to worry about if employees work from home?

A: The Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) does not have any regulations regarding telework in home offices. The agency issued a directive in February 2000 stating that the agency will not conduct inspections of employees' home offices, will not hold employers liable for employees' home offices, and does not expect employers to inspect the home offices of their employees. If OSHA receives a complaint about a home office, the complainant will be advised of OSHA's policy. If an employee makes a specific request, OSHA may informally let employers know of complaints about home office conditions, but will not follow-up with the employer or employee.

Employers who are required to keep records of work-related injuries and illnesses will continue to be responsible for keeping such records for injuries and illnesses occurring in a home office. The FLSA and its implementing regulations do not prevent employers from implementing telework or other flexible work arrangements allowing employees to work from home. Employers would still be required to maintain an accurate record of hours worked for all employees, including those participating in telework or other flexible work arrangements; and to pay no less than the minimum wage for all hours worked and to pay at least one and one-half

times the employee's regular rate of pay for all hours worked over 40 in a workweek to non-exempt employees.

Employers are encouraged to work with their employees to establish hours of work for employees who telework and a mechanism for recording each teleworking employee's hours of work. Non-exempt employees must receive the required minimum wage and overtime pay free and clear. This means that when a covered employee is required to provide the tools and equipment (e.g., computer, internet connection, facsimile machine, etc.) needed for telework, the cost of providing the tools and equipment may not reduce the employee's pay below that required by the FLSA. (See the U.S. Department of Labor [Wage and Hour Division](#) for additional information or call [1-866-487-9243](tel:1-866-487-9243) if you have questions.)

Leave under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act

Source: [Gallagher Insurance, Risk Management & Consulting](#)

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act created two types of paid emergency leave for impacted employees – Public Health Emergency Leave and Emergency Paid Sick Leave. Both categories of leave are effective April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. Please see the attached chart entitled *Leave under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act*, which compares the two types of leave and their key provisions.

Lagniappe

Q: What's the main workplace safety guidance we should follow?

A: The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recently published *Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19*, outlining steps employers can take to help protect their workforce. OSHA has divided workplaces and work operations into *four risk zones*, according to the likelihood of employees' occupational exposure during a pandemic. These risk zones are useful in determining appropriate work practices and precautions.

- **Very High Exposure Risk**
- **High Exposure Risk**
- **Medium Exposure Risk**
 - Employees with high-frequency contact with the general population (such as schools, high population density work environments, and some high-volume retail).
- **Lower Exposure Risk (Caution)**
 - Employees who have minimal occupational contact with the general public and other coworkers (such as office employees).

As essential staff of the City of Shreveport, we fall within the medium and lower exposure risk within our working environments.

Q: Can we ask an employee to stay home or leave work if they exhibit symptoms of the COVID-19 coronavirus or the flu?

A: Yes, you are permitted to ask them to seek medical attention and get tested for COVID-19. The CDC states that employees who exhibit symptoms of influenza-like illness at work during a pandemic should leave the workplace. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) confirmed that advising workers to go home is permissible and not considered disability-related if the symptoms present are akin to the COVID-19 coronavirus or the flu.

Q: If we learn or suspect that one of our employees has COVID-19, do we have a responsibility to report this information to the CDC?

A: No, the City of Shreveport is not obligated to report a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 to the CDC. The healthcare provider that receives the confirmation of a positive test result is a mandatory reporter who will handle that responsibility.

Q: Can we require an employee to notify the City of Shreveport if they have been exposed, have symptoms, and/or have tested positive for the COVID-19 coronavirus?

A: Yes, you should require any employee who becomes ill at work with COVID-19 coronavirus symptoms to notify their supervisor. Employees who are suffering from symptoms should be directed to remain at home until they are symptom-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing or symptom-altering medicines.

While outside of work, if an employee begins experiencing symptoms, has been exposed to someone that is exhibiting symptoms, or has tested positive, the employee should contact their immediate supervisor by telephone or email and should not report to work.

Any supervisor who becomes aware shall forward this information immediately to their Department Head, Risk Management, and Human Resources.

Q: Can an employee refuse to come to work because of fear of infection?

A: Employees are only entitled to refuse to work if they believe they are in imminent danger. Section 13(a) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act) defines “imminent danger” to include “any conditions or practices in any place of employment which are such that a danger exists which can reasonably be expected to cause death or serious physical harm immediately or before the imminence of such danger can be eliminated through the enforcement procedures otherwise provided by this Act.” OSHA discusses imminent danger as where there is “threat of death or serious physical harm,” or “a reasonable expectation that toxic substances or other health hazards are present, and exposure to them will shorten life or cause substantial reduction in physical or mental efficiency.”

The threat must be immediate or imminent, which means that an employee must believe that death or serious physical harm could occur within a short time, for example, before OSHA could investigate the problem. Most work conditions in the United States, however, do not meet the elements required for an employee to refuse to work. Once again, this guidance is general, and employers must determine when this unusual state exists in your workplace before determining whether it is permissible for employees to refuse to work.



The information in this article is current through March 20, 2020. However, given the fast changing nature of the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we acknowledge that facts will change and invite you to visit our pandemic [site](#) where we maintain up-to-date

Leave under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act created two types of paid emergency leave for impacted employees – Public Health Emergency Leave and Emergency Paid Sick Leave. Below we compare the two types of leave and their key provisions.

	Public Health Emergency Leave	Emergency Paid Sick Leave
Effective Date	April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020	April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020
Applicable Employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer with fewer than 500 employees • All governmental employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer with fewer than 500 employees • All governmental employers
Eligible Employee	Must be employed by Employer for at least 30 calendar days	Eligible regardless of employment length
Excluded Employees	Health care providers and emergency responders	Health care providers and emergency responders
Qualifying Reason(s)	The employee needs time off to care for the employee's child who is under 18 years of age because the child's school or place of care has been closed, or the child care provider of the son or daughter is unavailable, due to a public health emergency.	<p>(1) The employee is subject to a Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19.</p> <p>(2) The employee has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19.</p> <p>(3) The employee is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and seeking a medical diagnosis.</p> <p>(4) The employee is caring for an individual who is subject to a quarantine or isolation order as described in (1) above, above, or has been advised as described in (2) above.</p> <p>(5) The employee is caring for a son or daughter whose school or place of care has been closed, or the child care provider is unavailable, due to COVID-19 precautions.</p> <p>(6) The employee is experiencing any other substantially similar condition specified by the Secretary of Health and Human Services in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of Labor.</p>
Length of Leave	Up to 12 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80 hours for full-time employees • Average number of hours worked during a typical two-week period for part-time employees
Pay during leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First 10 days are unpaid, but employee may substitute paid leave. • After ten days of leave, employers must continue paid Public Health Emergency Leave at a rate of no less than two-thirds of the employee's usual rate of pay. The Act limits the amount of required paid leave to no more than \$200 per day and \$10,000 total. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$511 per day (\$5,110 in the aggregate) where leave is taken for reasons (1), (2), and (3) above calculated using 100% of an employee's regular rate of pay. • \$200 per day (\$2,000 in the aggregate) where leave is taken for reasons (4), (5), or (6) calculated using two-thirds of an employee's regular rate of pay.

The intent of this analysis is to provide general information regarding the provisions of current federal laws and regulation. It does not necessarily fully address all your organization's specific issues. It should not be construed as, nor is it intended to provide, legal advice. Your organization's general counsel or an attorney who specializes in this practice area should address questions regarding specific issues.