

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
Employee Guidelines
Frequently Asked Questions
Updated March 12, 2020

Below are answers to some questions that you may have related to the County's response and impact of the COVID-19.

GENERAL COVID-19 INFORMATION

Q.1. What is the 2019-Novel Coronavirus COVID-19 and what are its symptoms?

On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced an official name for the disease that is causing the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak. The new name of this disease is coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19. Formerly, this disease was referred to as "2019 novel coronavirus" or "2019-nCoV". There are [many types](#) of human corona viruses, including some that commonly cause mild upper-respiratory tract illnesses. COVID-19 is a new disease, caused by a novel (or new) coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans. This new virus has resulted in thousands of confirmed cases in China and in a growing number of other international locations, including the United States.

Symptoms of confirmed cases of the COVID-19 have ranged from people with little to no symptoms to people being severely ill and dying. Symptoms can include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Over 80 percent of individuals have mild disease.

Q.2. How does the virus spread?

There is evidence of increasing circulation of COVID-19 in our region. Older people and people with certain underlying health conditions like heart disease, lung disease and diabetes, for example, may be at greater risk of serious illness.

It is currently believed that the virus is spread mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or can be inhaled into the lungs.

Q.3. Who is at risk for serious illness from the virus?

Some persons are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19. Those considered at higher risk include:

- People over 60 years of age. The risk increases significantly thereafter and escalates with age, with persons over age 80 in the highest risk category.
- People, regardless of age, with underlying health conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, or chronic lung diseases like COPD, as well as those with severely weakened immune systems.

Individuals considered at higher risk for serious illness should follow the same protective guidance provided by the CDC:

- **Stay home from work if you are ill.** Consult your personal physician if you have a fever. Remain off work until you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a disposable tissue, if available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Get your flu shot to protect against flu or symptoms similar to COVID-19.
- Wash your hands often with liquid soap and water and rub for at least 20 seconds.
- Keep sick family members at home until symptoms resolve.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Q.4. Do I need to wear a facemask when meeting with clients/customers?

Currently, the CDC is not recommending the use of [facemasks](#) by the **general public** to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. Unless your position requires the use of a mask or the County determines that the severity of the outbreak warrants the use of a mask by certain positions, masks will not be used by County employees at this time. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should stay home.

Q.5. Will my supervisor provide me with hand sanitizer?

Based on your work location and interaction with the public, General Services Agency (GSA) will be working with departments to increase availability and distribution of disinfectant supplies. Additionally, employees are encouraged to follow CDC guidelines, which include washing hands frequently and using personal hand sanitizers as means to help prevent the spread of the viruses.

PERSONAL

Q.6. How do I reduce the risk of infection throughout the workplace?

California is still in the midst of the cold and flu season, and we cannot make assumptions about the type or severity of an employee's illness. However, as with any employee displaying flu-like symptoms at work, our recommendation is for the **employee to stay home and get better**, for their own health and for the health of the employee's co-workers/workplace, as well as the public.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent the COVID-19 infection. Public health recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses such as flu and colds generally, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- If you and your loved ones are not vaccinated for the flu this season, it is not too late!

COVID-19 SPECIFIC SCENARIOS

Q.7. Do I need to stay home after recent travel to one of the countries the CDC determines are Risk Level 3 (China, Italy, Iran, South Korea) even if I feel healthy?

Travelers returning from countries that have a Risk Level 3 [Travel Notice](#) (widespread, ongoing transmission), i.e., [China](#), [Iran](#), [Italy](#), and [South Korea](#)¹ are being placed by federal, state or local public health agencies on quarantine or receive treatment as follows:

- Should stay home for 14-days from the time you left the area.
- Individuals returning from Risk Level 3 countries who **DO NOT** have fever, cough, or shortness of breath will undergo self-quarantine at home with monitoring by their local health department (where the employee resides).
- Individuals returning from Risk Level 3 countries who **DO** have a fever, cough, or shortness of breath will receive an immediate medical assessment, appropriate testing and public health interventions.

Q.8. What should I do if a family member who lives with me has been exposed to or diagnosed with the COVID-19?

If anyone in your household has been in physical contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, please contact your health care provider and inform your agency/departmental personnel officer. You should self-quarantine and monitor for symptoms.

If the employee's household member came into direct contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 and the household member *is showing symptoms*, then the employee should self-quarantine and monitor for symptoms. The employee should also contact their health care provider if they begin showing symptoms.

However, if the employee did not come into direct contact with someone known to have COVID-19 and the employee does not have any symptoms of COVID-19, then the employee is expected to report to work.

Q.9. I have been quarantined (stay home based on exposure to a confirmed COVID-19 case) and I have internet access at my quarantine location. Can I work from my quarantine location rather than remain off work?

¹ Currently this does not include travel from Hong Kong, Macau or Taiwan.

Telecommuting will be based on business needs and operational viability as not all departments or positions have the ability to telecommute. Management will make the assessment to determine feasibility. Please make sure to communicate with your immediate supervisor and agency/department human resources contact (list attached).

Q.10. I have been quarantined (stay home based on exposure to a confirmed COVID-19 case) and I am unable to work from my quarantine location. Can I use my accrued leave during this period?

Yes. You can use your accrued leave (sick, vacation, compensatory time, floating holiday, holiday-in-lieu) during your absence from work. If you do not have any accrued leave, your absence will be coded as authorized leave without pay.

Q.11. The school attended by my school age child (K-6) has temporarily closed and I do not have child-care alternatives. What are my options?

Contact your immediate supervisor and your agency/department human resources contact (list attached) for consideration to telecommute. Telecommuting will be based on business needs and operational viability as not all departments or positions have the ability to telecommute. If telecommuting is not an option, employees can use accrued leave (vacation, compensatory time, floating holiday, holiday-in-lieu).

Q.12. I have been off for about a week due to a regular cold, must I provide a note from my health care provider in order to return to work?

The County will not require a doctor's note at this time to verify sickness caused by acute respiratory illness or flu-like symptoms, as medical offices and clinics may be advising patients not to come in and therefore cannot provide medical verifications. This applies to both sick leave verification and return-to-work releases.

For absences due to other types of illness or injury, employees are expected to adhere to their departmental practice regarding providing a doctor's note and/or a release to return to work for an absence in excess of three (3) days.

Q.13. Can my supervisor ask me to go home if I am exhibiting flu-like symptoms?

Yes, your supervisor may ask you to go home if you are exhibiting flu-like symptoms. For your own health and for the health of your co-workers, employees exhibiting flu-like symptoms should remain at home.

Q.14. I will be unable to travel as scheduled. Can I request to cancel my vacation and request to rebid?

Employees may choose to cancel their scheduled vacation or activity based on the [Travel Notice](#) issued by the CDC, and coordinate with their supervisor regarding return to work. However, cancellation of vacation destination or activity does not warrant or impact the vacation bidding requirement(s) outlined in departmental policy and/or MOU. If you do not participate in a bid process, you may be permitted to reschedule a pre-approved vacation leave request, subject to the operational needs of the agency/department.

Q.15. I have a serious medical condition that is impacted by employees exhibiting flu-like symptoms, can I request to be relocated?

If you have a serious medical condition or a medical condition that you believe may require a reasonable accommodation, please contact your agency/department human resources contact (list attached) and request a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act/Federal Employee and Housing Act (ADA/FEHA).

Q.16. I am scheduled to attend a conference. Will the County allow attendance at the conference? And, what if I must cancel my attendance or the conference is cancelled for public health reasons?

These will be handled on a case-by-case basis. You should speak with your immediate supervisor on any potential change in plans as these will be impacted by your destination and emergency declarations issued by either the state or local agency or cancellations by the conference organizers. You should also actively monitor any scheduled conferences in the event of cancellations. If you request to cancel your attendance due to illness and/or concerns, speak with your supervisor/manager to discuss options and if applicable, consult with your event coordinator and hotel to determine the cancellation (refund) policy.

Q.17. I am an older adult who is at higher risk due to my age and am concerned about exposure to COVID-19. Will the County be providing any special precautionary measures for me?

As your employer, the County is taking measures to promote the health and safety of all employees. However, as with the above advice, if you have a medical condition that you believe requires an accommodation, you should contact your agency/department human resources contact (list attached) and request a reasonable accommodation under the ADA/FEHA.

EMPLOYEE LEAVE AND COMPENSATION

Q.18. What are my leave options if I am in quarantine or in isolation due to COVID-19 and I do not have any accrued sick leave?

Consistent with existing policy and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) requirements, you may apply for [FMLA](#) benefits. Moreover, you may also use accrued paid leave (vacation, compensatory time, floating holiday, etc.). If you exhaust all of your accrued

leave, your supervisor/manager may approve authorized leave without pay as needed. You are also encouraged to apply for [State Disability Insurance \(SDI\)](#). If you are not currently sick but advised or ordered to remain home due to recent travel from a CDC defined Risk Level 3 country, you should refer to your agency/department human resources contact (list attached) regarding coding of time off on your timesheet and the feasibility of allowing you to work remotely.

Q.19. I have been quarantined for 14-days but I do not have sufficient sick leave to cover my absence, can I use my other accrued leave while I am in quarantine and do I need to provide a release to return to work from my health care provider?

As noted above, you are allowed to use your accrued paid leave, and you can request Authorized Leave Without Pay once you have exhausted your accrued leaves. At this time, the County is not requiring documentation for an employee's compliance with a bona fide quarantine.

Q.20. I have exhausted all my accrued leave and I am quarantined. What are my options?

You can code your absence as Authorized Leave Without Pay. You can also file a claim with [California State Disability Insurance](#) for lost wages associated with COVID-19-related absences resulting from quarantine and illness.

COLLEAGUES

Q.21. Will my supervisor announce when one of my colleagues has called in sick with the flu?

No. Personal health information cannot be released or discussed with others without the permission of the employee.

Q.22. A coworker was quarantined recently. Does this mean that I or other members of my work unit will also be quarantined?

The Public Health Department in the quarantined employee's county of residence will make a determination on individuals who should be quarantined and work with the Alameda County Public Health Department to make appropriate notifications to affected employees. If the recommendation from your county of residence is for you to quarantine, you should contact your agency/department human resources staff for information related to your rights under the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act/California Family Rights Act (FMLA/CFRA) as well as information on how to apply for FMLA/CFRA benefits.

Q.23. One of my colleagues was quarantined and allowed to return to work, do I still have to work next to him?

According to the CDC, someone who has completed quarantine does not pose a risk of infection to other people.

Q.24. My colleague is exhibiting flu-like symptoms. What do I do?

Speak with your immediate supervisor or agency/department human resources contact who will speak with your colleague who is exhibiting flu-like symptoms.

Q.25. I am concerned about my colleague with whom I share an office who is constantly sneezing and/or coughing. Can I request to be relocated?

If your colleague is exhibiting flu-like symptoms, contact your supervisor and/or agency/department human resources contact (list attached). Moreover, if you have a medical condition that you believe may require a reasonable accommodation under the ADA/FEHA, please contact your agency/department human resources contact (list attached).

Q.26. I travelled to a non-Level 3 Risk location on vacation, will my supervisor require me to self-quarantine?

No. For non-Level 3 countries, there is no expectation for self-quarantine. If the employee is sick, the employee should stay home. If the employee chooses to self-quarantine, the employee should share their travel history with their agency/department human resources.

CLIENTS/PUBLIC

Q.27. How do we deal with situations that involve clients coming into the facility and saying that they have COVID-19?

In the absence of a confirmed test, there is no way for any employee to know who might have COVID-19. However, in the event a client comes into a facility indicating that they have COVID-19 and is showing symptoms of respiratory illness, employee should contact their immediate supervisor. As general guidance, it depends on the facility and whether there is a barrier between the employee and the client. CDC recommends maintaining an approximate six (6) feet of distance and avoiding close contact.

High risk close contact is defined by the CDC as:

- a. *being within approximately 6 feet of a COVID-19 case for a prolonged period of time; close contact can occur while caring for, living with, visiting, or sharing a health care waiting area or room with a COVID-19 case, or*
- b. *having direct contact with saliva and mucus of a COVID-19 case (example being coughed on).*

Q.28. If I have a client who is quarantined, should I also take precautionary measures?

Clients who are quarantined will not be allowed to receive any visitors (home visits from employees). Therefore, except for designated health care professionals, employees should reschedule missed appointments for after the quarantine ends. Agency/department personnel should adhere to applicable established safety protocols.