

# **Safer Federal Workforce Task Force**

## **COVID-19 Workplace Safety: Agency Model Safety Principles**

Issued July 29, 2021

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to provide model safety principles for executive departments and agencies (hereafter, “agency” and collectively, “agencies”) for their COVID-19 workplace safety plans. In Executive Order No. 13991, President Biden established the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force](#) to oversee the development and implementation of agency COVID-19 workplace safety plans across the Federal Government.

Agencies should incorporate these principles into their existing COVID-19 workplace safety plans. Agencies with onsite contractors should address how the protocols below are being applied to contractor personnel to promote Federal workplace safety in the context of COVID-19.

### **Overview of Model Principles**

The Federal Government is committed to addressing essential work requirements consistent with best public health practices. The Administration’s paramount concern is the health and safety of all Federal employees, onsite contractors, and individuals interacting with the Federal workforce.

The principles presented here are aligned with the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for [employers](#) and for [fully vaccinated people](#) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) on [protecting workers](#), based on evolving understanding of the pandemic. These principles will be reassessed over time, as conditions warrant and as CDC guidelines are updated.

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.

### **Goal**

The health and safety of the Federal workforce is the Administration’s highest priority.

### **Key Updates to Model Safety Principles**

Consistent with CDC guidance, in areas of high or substantial transmission (see the [CDC COVID-19 Data Tracker County View](#)), Federal employees, contractors, and visitors must wear a mask inside Federal buildings, except for the limited exceptions discussed in the section on *Face Masks and Physical Distancing* below. Individuals who are not fully vaccinated must wear a mask regardless of community transmission level.

Federal agencies need to ask about the vaccination status of Federal employees and onsite contractors—employees and onsite contractors must sign an attestation confirming their vaccination status, or they will be treated as not fully vaccinated for purposes of safety protocols. Federal agencies also must establish a program to test not fully vaccinated Federal employees and onsite contractors weekly or twice-weekly.

In addition to receiving paid time off to be vaccinated and to deal with any side effects, employees will receive paid time off if they need to accompany a family member being vaccinated.

Fully vaccinated Federal employees and onsite contractors do not need to physically distance or participate in weekly screening testing, and are not subject to any Government-wide restrictions on official travel (although agency travel policies still apply). In areas of high or substantial transmission, they need to wear a mask in public indoor settings in Federal buildings. In areas of low or moderate transmission, they do not need to wear a mask.

Those Federal employees and onsite contractors who are not fully vaccinated or decline to provide their vaccination status must wear a mask, physically distance, and comply with a weekly or twice-weekly screening testing requirement, and are subject to Government-wide restrictions on official travel.

Visitors must provide information on their vaccination status and comply with the requisite safety protocols. Visitors who are not fully vaccinated or decline to provide their vaccination status must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than the previous 3 days prior to entry to a Federal building or in-person participation in a Federally hosted meeting, event, or conference. The requirement to provide information on vaccination status and a negative COVID-19 test does not apply to members of the public entering a Federal building or Federal land to obtain a public service or benefit. If they are not fully vaccinated, these visitors must comply with all relevant CDC guidance, including wearing a mask and physically distancing from other people.

## **Health and Safety**

### *Information about Vaccination*

The Administration strongly encourages all Americans who are eligible for vaccination, including Federal employees and contractors, to be vaccinated. Employees will receive paid time off to be vaccinated and to deal with any side effects. Employees will also receive paid time off to accompany a family member being vaccinated. For this purpose, a “family member” is an individual who meets the definition of that term in OPM’s leave regulations (see 5 CFR 630.201).

Given the different safety protocols for individuals who are fully vaccinated and those who are not fully vaccinated, agencies need to ask about the vaccination status of Federal employees and onsite contractors. Employees and onsite contractors must attest to the truthfulness of the response they provide. If an employee or onsite contractor chooses not to provide a response, they will be treated as not fully vaccinated for the purposes of these protocols. In requesting this information, agencies should comply with any applicable Federal laws, including requirements under the Privacy Act and the Paperwork Reduction Act, and any applicable collective bargaining obligations. When an employee or contractor discloses that they are not fully vaccinated or declines to complete the attestation, agencies should treat that individual as not fully vaccinated for purposes of implementing safety measures, including with respect to mask wearing, physical distancing, testing, travel, and quarantine as discussed in further detail below.

Visitors to Federal buildings should also be asked to provide information about vaccination status. In requesting this information, agencies should comply with any applicable Federal laws, including requirements under the Privacy Act and the Paperwork Reduction Act. Visitors who are not fully vaccinated or who decline to provide information about their vaccination status must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than the previous 3 days prior to entry to a Federal building. See the section below on *Meetings, Events, and Conferences* for how these visitor requirements apply to in-person participants in meetings, events, and conferences hosted by agencies.

These requirements related to the provision of information about vaccination and provision of proof of a recent negative COVID-19 test do not apply to members of the public entering a Federal building or Federal land to obtain a public service or benefit. If they are not fully vaccinated, these visitors must comply with all relevant CDC guidance, including wearing a mask and physically distancing from other people.

### *Levels of Community Transmission*

For purposes of this guidance, when determining levels of community transmission in a given area, agencies should reference the [CDC COVID-19 Data Tracker County View](#). Agencies can use discretion in determining the counties relevant to the determination of the level of community transmission in a given area for a given Federal facility. For example, agencies may consider the county in which an agency facility is located as well as the transmission levels of surrounding local counties from which employees commute to the facility.

### *Telework and Remote Work*

Agencies should utilize telework and remote work consistent with the principles set forth in [OMB Memorandum M-21-25](#) and agency plans for reentry and post-reentry.

### *COVID-19 Coordination Team*

Each agency should maintain its COVID-19 Coordination Team, as detailed in [OMB Memorandum M-21-15](#). This team should, at a minimum, include a representative from: each component agency (if applicable); the appropriate human resources office(s); occupational safety and health experts; executive leadership; legal counsel; and a public health expert. If such a public health expert does not exist at the agency, the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force will designate someone. The team should meet regularly to review compliance with 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 should coordinate all decisions with Facility Security Committees, as appropriate. For privately owned facilities leased by the Federal Government, the team must coordinate with the General Services Administration (GSA), where appropriate, and the lessor's designated representative.

### *Face Masks and Physical Distancing*

Individuals who are not fully vaccinated must wear a mask regardless of community transmission level. In areas of high or substantial transmission, fully vaccinated people must wear a mask in public indoor settings, except for limited exceptions discussed in this section.

In areas of low or moderate transmission, in most settings, [fully vaccinated](#) people generally do not need to wear a mask or physically distance in Federal buildings or on Federal land, except where required by Federal, State, local, Tribal, or territorial laws, rules, or regulations. Fully vaccinated individuals might choose to wear a mask regardless of the level of transmission for a variety of reasons. Nothing in CDC guidance precludes an employee from wearing a mask, if the employee so chooses. CDC's guidance for mask wearing and physical distancing in specific settings, including [healthcare](#), [transportation](#), [correctional and detention facilities](#), and [schools](#), should be followed, as applicable.

Federal employees and onsite contractors who are not fully vaccinated or who decline to provide their vaccination status—or who are in an area of substantial or high transmission—must [wear a mask](#) that [covers their nose and mouth](#), and that is in accordance with current CDC guidance. CDC [recommends](#) the following: 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. Agencies should not allow novelty or non-protective masks, masks with ventilation valves, or face shields as a substitute for masks.

Individuals who are not fully vaccinated or who decline to provide information about their vaccination status—including employees, onsite contractors, and those visitors who are required to provide vaccination status—must maintain distance [and](#) properly wear masks. To the extent practicable, individuals who are not fully vaccinated or who decline to provide information about their vaccination status should maintain a distance of at least six feet from others at all times, consistent with CDC guidelines, including in offices, conference rooms, and all other communal and work spaces.

In the vast majority of cases, employees who are not vaccinated due to disability or religious practices or beliefs will be able to follow the safety protocols for not fully vaccinated individuals as a reasonable accommodation. In the rare case where they cannot, or where it is otherwise required by law, other reasonable accommodations should be made, barring undue hardship. Some individuals may require accommodations under applicable law relating to masking requirements, and such accommodations should be in accordance with existing [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidance](#).

For individuals who are required to wear a mask:

- Appropriate masks should be worn consistently and correctly (over mouth and nose).
- Appropriate masks should be worn in any common areas or shared workspaces (including open floorplan office space, cubicle embankments, and conference rooms).
- In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors. However, [consistent with CDC guidance](#), those who are not fully vaccinated should wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during outdoor activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.
- Agencies may provide for exceptions consistent with CDC guidelines, for example, when an individual is alone in an office with floor to ceiling walls and a closed door, or for a limited time when eating or drinking and maintaining distancing in accordance with CDC guidelines.

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

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

### *Testing*

Agencies must establish a program to test Federal employees and contractors working onsite who are not fully vaccinated, or who decline to provide information about their vaccination status, for COVID-19 weekly or twice-weekly. Agencies do not need to regularly test employees and contractors who are fully vaccinated.

### *Contact Tracing*

The agency's COVID-19 Coordination Team will collaborate with and support the contact tracing programs of local health departments to help identify, track, and manage contacts of COVID-19 cases.

The team will engage in coordination with facilities staff to implement infection control and workplace safety efforts once informed of a known or suspected case of COVID-19 (due either to specific symptoms or a positive test).

The team should ensure that the agency makes disclosures to local public health officials, as required or necessary, to provide for the health and safety of Federal employees, contractors, and the general public, in accordance with local public health mandates. If COVID-19 cases occur within a specific building or work setting, it will be the responsibility of that agency's COVID-19 Coordination Team (or a field office or agency component designee) to determine—in consultation with local public health officials—appropriate next steps. Agencies should be transparent in communicating related information to the workforce, as relevant and appropriate; disclosures must be consistent with Federal, State, and local privacy and confidentiality laws and regulations.

### *Travel*

Federal employees should adhere strictly to CDC [guidelines](#) before, during, and after travel.

For Federal employees who are fully vaccinated, there are no Government-wide restrictions on travel (although agency travel policies still apply).

For Federal employees who are not fully vaccinated or who decline to provide information about their vaccination status, official domestic travel should be limited to only necessary mission-critical trips. International travel should also be avoided, if at all possible, unless it is mission critical (e.g., military deployments, COVID-19 response deployments or activities, diplomats traveling, high-level international negotiations that cannot occur remotely). Heads of agencies should issue specific guidance to account for the particulars of their agency's mission.

### *Meetings, Events, and Conferences*

Should an agency intend to host an in-person meeting, conference, or event that will be attended by more than 50 participants—regardless of whether participants include members of the public—the agency must first seek the approval of its agency head, in consultation with the agency's COVID-19 Coordination Team.

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

### *Symptom Monitoring*

If Federal employees, onsite contractors, or visitors have symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they should not enter a Federal workplace.

Federal employees and contractors working on site should regularly complete virtual or in-person health checks (ask about symptoms, close contact with someone with SARS-CoV-2 infection, and SARS-CoV-2 testing and diagnosis status). The agency will use this information to assess the individual's risk level and

to determine whether the individual should be allowed entry to the workplace. Visitors may be asked to complete symptom screening before entering a Federal facility. In developing these tools, agencies may adapt the one developed by [CDC](#).

Any individual, regardless of vaccination status, who develops [any symptoms consistent with COVID-19](#) during the workday must immediately isolate, wear a mask (if the individual is not already doing so and one is available), notify their supervisor, and promptly leave the workplace. Agencies should have processes in place to provide advice and support to supervisors on any related reporting or human resources requirements.

#### *Quarantine, Isolation, and Steps for Fully Vaccinated Individuals Following Exposure to Someone with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19*

Any individual with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 will be advised to isolate, [pursuant to CDC guidelines](#), and in compliance with State, local, and Tribal laws and regulations. Personnel who are not fully vaccinated and who have had a close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 should follow [CDC](#) and State, local, and Tribal guidance for quarantine.

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

#### *Confidentiality and Privacy*

All medical information collected from individuals, including vaccination information, test results, and any other information obtained as a result of testing and symptom monitoring, will be treated in accordance with applicable laws and policies on confidentiality and privacy, and will be accessible only to those with a need to know. Agencies should consult their Senior Agency Officials for Privacy on matters related to the handling of personally identifiable information and identify a point of contact for all questions relating to personal medical information.

## **Workplace Operations**

#### *Occupancy*

Agencies may establish occupancy limits for specific workplaces as a means of facilitating physical distancing. Note that by reducing the number of people in a space, occupancy limits also increase the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning delivery of outdoor air per person.

#### *Environmental Cleaning*

Agencies should ensure regular cleaning of common use, high-touch, and high-density spaces, such as lobbies, restrooms, elevators, and stairwells. Office space that is in regular use is to be cleaned regularly, and in accordance with [CDC guidelines](#). Wipes and other [Environmental Protection Agency-approved disinfectants](#) will be made available for use by individuals to wipe down workstations and related personal property. Physical barriers, such as plexiglass shields, may be installed, where appropriate.

In the event of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the workplace, agencies should ensure enhanced environmental cleaning of the spaces that the individual occupied or accessed in accordance with CDC and, where applicable, GSA guidance, which provides as follows:



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

If enhanced cleaning is required, wait as long as possible (at least several hours) before cleaning and disinfecting. Extended wait periods allow increased opportunity for viral deactivation to occur naturally, while also allowing time for aerosols to settle, prior to surface disinfection.

The agency’s COVID-19 Coordination Team will determine the appropriate scope of workplace closures needed—in some cases, it may be a suite or individual 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. Hand sanitizers should contain at least 60% alcohol and be manufactured in accordance with the requirements of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Ingredients should be listed on a “Drug Facts” label. Agencies should ensure the hand sanitizer is not on the FDA’s [do not use](#) list.

### *Ventilation and Air Filtration*

Modifications to ventilation systems should be considered in accordance with CDC [guidance](#), especially as building population density increases. To the maximum extent feasible, indoor ventilation will be optimized to increase the proportion of outdoor air and improve filtration. Deployment of portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) cleaners should be considered for higher-risk spaces (e.g., health clinics).

### *Collective Bargaining Obligations*

Consistent with President Biden’s policy to support collective bargaining, agencies are reminded to satisfy applicable collective bargaining obligations under 5 U.S.C. Chapter 71 when implementing workplace safety plans. Agencies are also strongly encouraged to communicate regularly with employee representatives on workplace safety matters.