

**To: Connecticut State Agencies**

**From: The Office of Policy & Management and the Department of Administrative Services**

**Re: Guidance regarding matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including on-site work, workplace safety, telework, and absences due to COVID-related illness**

**Date: August 9, 2021**

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Over the past fifteen months, the State of Connecticut has continued to respond to the rapidly changing circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. State agencies have made every effort to continue their operations and provide the services and programs that are relied upon by the citizens and businesses of Connecticut.

Now, as vaccination rates rise, the State enters a critical transitional phase for re-populating its workplaces safely and effectively. This general guidance is being provided to agencies and State employees to assist in the overall understanding of and available means of responding to various circumstances and issues related to these efforts. Agency-specific instructions designed to meet each Agency's individual operational needs may be developed and provided by the employing agency.

## **RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE PARAMETERS FOR JUNE 1, 2021 AND JULY 1, 2021**

On May 13, 2021, Governor Lamont announced that the State would begin planning for a new normal working environment, and listed June 1, 2021 and July 1, 2021 as target dates.

- **The 6/1 date calls for "customer facing agencies" to resume in-person services.**  
As of this date, customer facing agencies were to have resumed in-person services. The term "customer facing" means that the agency provides customer service to the public or serves a specific client base within the general public. The terms should be interpreted broadly.
- **Update 8/5/2021:** Return to the worksite for employees who teleworked during the pandemic period is addressed under the "Telework" Section below.

## **WORKPLACE SAFETY**

The Department of Administrative Services has published guidance for agencies regarding safe practices in worksites. You may access that information using this link:

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DAS/Facilities/Facilities-Requirements-and-Guidelines-for-Re-Opening-Facilities\\_DAS\\_7adocx.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DAS/Facilities/Facilities-Requirements-and-Guidelines-for-Re-Opening-Facilities_DAS_7adocx.pdf)

Here are some important things to remember:

- There are no longer any building occupancy restrictions.
- Social distancing requirements will remain at 6 feet, regardless of employee vaccination status. So, **while there are no longer any building occupancy restrictions in place**, agencies may have to consider workspace distribution as a factor in work schedules, including telework.
- Masks are still required in common areas. DPH guidance recommends that all employees continue the practice of wearing a mask in hallways, conference rooms, elevators, and other common areas. This requirement applies to everyone, regardless of vaccination status.
- In direct care / congregate living facilities (prisons, hospitals, inpatient facilities), masks are still mandatory in accordance with CDC guidance.
- If employees are refusing to return to the workplace, an agency's Human Resources Team should take these steps -
  - Find out why they are refusing.
  - Does the reason fall under an issue within the published DAS/OPM guidance? Please refer to the grid below.
    - Are they currently COVID +?
    - Do they have a documented medical condition that does not allow them to return or does not allow them to even be vaccinated?
    - Is the ADA interactive process appropriate?
    - Is the employee claiming COVID fragility or themselves or a family member?
    - Should the employee be referred to EAP?
    - Do they understand how the schedule will be working for teleworkers, at 50% on-site?
    - Are they claiming a bona fide religious exemption requiring an accommodation?
  - If a temporary accommodation had been in place for an employee whose health care provider indicated they could not report to work during the pandemic due to their own or a family member's condition, please obtain supporting medical documentation to update the case.

## CONTACT TRACING

Agencies should continue to follow existing procedures for conducting contact tracing, for reporting COVID positive cases, and for providing all necessary notifications. Please refer to the existing [OPM/DAS COVID-19 guidance](#) for details, in particular #44. **There is one update from the existing guidance:**

### Update 8/5/2021:

Fully vaccinated people who have a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be tested 3-5 days after exposure. The CDC also indicates that these individuals should wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days or until they receive a negative test result. They should isolate if they test positive. (Please note that current Workplace Safety guidance for State employees, as cited above, requires **all**

employees to wear a mask in common areas, regardless of their vaccination status.)

Fully vaccinated people with no COVID-like symptoms do not need to quarantine, and are not restricted from work following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, if they follow the testing and masking recommendation above. Fully vaccinated people should monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following an exposure.

## MANDATORY TESTING AGENCIES

Agencies that currently engage in routine mandatory testing may allow employees to opt out of routine testing if the employee can provide evidence that they have been fully vaccinated. Employees identified as having had close contact with a suspected or confirmed COVID positive case must be tested consistent with the August 5, 2021 update above. **Fully vaccinated** refers to a person who is:

- $\geq 2$  weeks following receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series, or  $\geq 2$  weeks following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine; there is currently no post-vaccination time limit on fully vaccinated status
- This guidance applies to COVID-19 vaccines currently authorized for emergency use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration: Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Johnson and Johnson (J&J)/Janssen COVID-19 vaccines. This guidance can also be applied to COVID-19 vaccines that have been authorized for emergency use by the World Health Organization (e.g. AstraZeneca/Oxford).

Healthcare agencies are encouraged to continue to reference the CDC website for updates/changes to guidance.

## TELEWORK

### Update 8/5/2021:

Effective 8/3/2021 a stipulated agreement was reached between the State and SEBAC resulting in a reset period of sixty days from August 3, 2021 through October 2, 2021.

- For 60 days following the execution of the revised agreement (the reset period) employees who were teleworking prior to Governor Ned Lamont's May 13 email have the choice of returning to their pre-July 1 schedule (i.e. the one that was in effect during the approximate period of March 2020 through July 1, 2021), or they can continue with whatever is in place today.
- This choice to return to the pre-July 1 schedule does not apply to hazardous duty employees, or "those whose consistent presence at the work site or in the field is now required because of the reopening of in-person operations which were suspended during the pre-July 1, 2021, period."
- If operations have reopened at an employee's worksite or in the field and those operations cannot be performed by teleworking at a 50% schedule, the employee will

only be approved for the amount of telework, if any, that can be performed from the employee's home.

- Managers and other non-represented staff remain eligible to telework per the above parameters.

## **LEVEL DESIGNATION SPREADSHEETS**

OPM will be requesting that Agencies prepare and submit updated Level Designation Spreadsheets in the coming weeks. Agencies will be asked to reflect the status of employees as of July 1, 2021. Spreadsheets will not need to be submitted in advance of July 1 - instructions will be sent under separate cover, along with timeframes for preparation and submission.

## **TRAVEL**

There are currently no restrictions for return to work following travel. Please refer to the following link: <https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus/travel>

## **PAID LEAVE UNDER 5-248(a)**

Paid leave under 5-248(a) remains available to employees with proper documentation and in accordance with [OLR General Notice No. 2020-03](#). Under certain circumstances, an employee may have access to a second allotment of paid leave under 5-248(a). General parameters regarding access to and use of paid leave under 5-248(a) for COVID leave purposes remain in effect as illustrated in the grid below, and include:

- A single allotment of paid leave in the amount of hours that an employee is scheduled during a 14-day calendar period.
- Leave may be used consistent with the guidance in the grid below.
- COVID-related reasons for use of leave include personal illness; providing care for a family member who is sick with COVID-19; school or daycare closure due to COVID-19; monitoring of a family member who has confirmed close contact with a COVID positive case.
- Leave may be used intermittently, and in conjunction with telework, where appropriate and authorized.
- A second allotment of paid COVID leave may be available under specific circumstances, including personal COVID-related illness and the employee having been confirmed (through contact tracing) as a confirmed close contact of a COVID positive individual.

## REPORTING TO WORK GUIDANCE

### *If you feel sick with COVID-like symptoms:*

- If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, you should not come to work, and should contact your medical provider for instruction.

### *If you or a family member is struggling:*

- It is also important to be aware that if an employee and/or a family member is struggling to adjust to changes associated with COVID-19, *including a return to the workplace*, Agency EAP programs are available and offer a variety of benefits and services to assist employees and their dependents in time of need.

The guidance provided in the grid below addresses specific COVID-19 situations which an employee may encounter. Please note that full-time telework may be available and permissible during a period of illness, quarantine, or isolation, subject to Agency review and authorization. Some scenarios may prompt the Agency to engage in an interactive process with an individual employee. *(The grid below contains updated information and replaces the grid which appears in previous guidance documents.)*

Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
<b>EMPLOYEE SHALL NOT PHYSICALLY REPORT TO WORK</b>	<b>EMPLOYEE SHALL NOT PHYSICALLY REPORT TO WORK</b>	<b>EMPLOYEE IS NOT PROHIBITED FROM WORKING</b>	<b>EMPLOYEE IS NOT PROHIBITED FROM WORKING</b>
Employee is actually sick with COVID-19 or COVID-19-like symptoms.	Employee has been directed by a medical provider or government official to self-monitor at home due to potential COVID-19 exposure or employee's underlying medical condition.	Employee needs to stay at home to care for children or other dependents as a result of potential COVID-19 exposure and consequently cannot attend school, daycare or eldercare.	Employee who is domiciled with or had contact with a person who has been directed by a medical provider or governmental official to self-monitor at home.
Employee is caring for sick family with COVID-19 or COVID-19-like symptoms.			Employee had contact with someone who had contact with a person who has been directed by a medical provider or government official to self-monitor at

			home.
			Employee who has concerns about exposure through contact with persons in public settings, including the workplace.
			Employee is medically fragile (per medical documentation on file at the agency) but has had no apparent exposure.
<b>GUIDANCE</b>	<b>GUIDANCE</b>	<b>GUIDANCE</b>	<b>GUIDANCE</b>
Full-time telework for the duration of the COVID illness, if approved by agency AND medically documented.	Telework, if approved by agency.	Telework or flex schedule, if approved by agency.	Report according to most current schedule, incorporating Telework, where authorized.
If telework is not possible, employee will be paid for the scheduled, non-worked hours within a 14 day calendar period under 5-248(a). (If employee teleworks part-time, the 5-248(a) leave will provide wages for the balance of hours scheduled to work.)	If telework is not possible, employee will be paid for the scheduled, non-worked hours within a 14 day calendar period under 5-248(a). With proper documentation, an employee may have access to a second allotment of paid leave under 5-248(a).  If employee has previously exhausted paid leave under 5-248(a), any future self-monitoring or quarantine period may be covered by accrued leave (including sick leave),	If telework is not possible, employee will be paid for the scheduled, non-worked hours within a 14 day calendar period under 5-248(a). (If employee teleworks part-time, the 5-248(a) leave will provide wages for the balance of hours scheduled to work.)	Employee may request to use accruals to take time away from work consistent with standard policies.

	<p>or the employee will be placed on unpaid leave.</p> <p>(If employee teleworks part-time, the 5-248(a) leave will provide wages for the balance of hours scheduled to work.)</p> <p>In any circumstance that falls under this level, the employee who must undergo self-monitoring or quarantine shall provide supporting documentation.</p>		
<p>If the employee's illness or need to care for sick family members continues beyond the 14 calendar days, employee may use earned accruals or choose to go unpaid, <b>provided that sick employees must use their sick leave accruals first.</b> Once the employee has exhausted sick leave accruals, they can use other accruals, take unpaid leave, or apply for additional benefits as provided by state policy or collective bargaining agreement.</p>	<p>If a medical provider or government official directs an employee to stay home beyond 14 days, the employee may request leave per standard practice.</p>	<p>If employee's inability to come to work because of COVID-19-related disruptions continues beyond the 14 calendar days, the employee may request, per standard practice, to use any earned accruals, including sick leave, or take unpaid leave.</p>	