

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF COVID-19 RESPONSE EFFORTS

March 18, 2021

Since the first indications of a viral pneumonia circulating in Wuhan, China, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has taken on the challenges presented by COVID-19. Thanks to the efforts of our mission and operational experts across DHS, we have facilitated a speedy, whole-of-Department response to mitigate the spread of this disease and its impact on our employees.

Throughout the past year, we have actively addressed this dynamic public health crisis and its impact on the DHS workforce. We have developed and updated workforce safety guidance and employee COVID-19 resources, in response to new and emerging information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health (DOL-OSHA).

PROTECTING THE DHS WORKFORCE

While protecting the homeland from threats such as COVID-19, DHS must also protect the tens of thousands of employees standing guard at the borders, working on vital missions domestically and abroad, and engaging with the public on a daily basis. From the very beginning of the pandemic, DHS took a range of actions from adapting pay and leave policies, to establishing a full-time command center for employee health issues, to maximizing telework when possible, and temporarily suspending in-person services at field offices when necessary. DHS is also focused on crucial PPE and each Component surveyed its personnel's needs and responded appropriately, such as TSA's distribution and mandated use of surgical masks. As the pandemic persisted, DHS Components also developed contact tracing programs to assist in outbreak tracking and prevention.

Beginning in January 2020, the Department of Homeland Security promulgated guidance for many facets of our work, including PPE, travel, gatherings, facilities safety and cleaning, employee flexibilities and resources, to operate in a pandemic environment. Much of this guidance was issued at a strategic level to allow location- and mission-specific implementation in coordination with local health requirements, operational needs, and Component medical staff. This approach was critical to an effective response – in a department this large and with multiple mission sets, a “one size fits all” would have most certainly failed and created unnecessary workforce health risks and vulnerabilities.

As a “one-stop shop” for our employees, DHS has two comprehensive websites that contain all of the strategic materials and guidance issued in the last year.¹

Below is a summary of the DHS plan, including primary guidance issued by DHS Headquarters to all offices and Components.

¹ The COVID-19 [Workforce Information website](#) contains updated guidance and resources for assistance protecting the DHS workforce.

The [COVID-19 Vaccine Website](#) contains updated information and resources on the COVID-19 vaccines. Employees can send questions regarding the COVID-19 vaccine to DHSCOVID-19Vaccines@hq.dhs.gov.

CDC and DOL/OSHA Guidance:

- a. Sick Individuals:** DHS will follow CDC guidance regarding employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness. Such employees will be asked to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8°C] or greater using an oral thermometer), have not had signs of a fever (e.g., flushed and sweating without exertion), for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g., cough suppressants), and it has been at least 10 days since their first symptoms occurred. Personnel are advised to use the CDC Coronavirus [self-checker](#) to help determine when to seek testing and medical care.
- b. Isolate:** Any individual who develops any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 while at the workplace must immediately isolate, notify their supervisor, and promptly leave the workplace. Any individual with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 should be advised to isolate pursuant to CDC guidelines and in compliance with local laws/regulations.
- c. Quarantine:** Personnel who have had a close contact in the past seven days with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 should be advised to follow CDC and local guidance for quarantine.
- d. Vaccinated Persons:** Employees with an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 are not required to quarantine if they meet all of the following criteria:
 - Are fully vaccinated (i.e., ≥ 2 weeks following receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series, or ≥ 2 weeks following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine)
 - Are within 3 months following receipt of the last dose in the series
 - Have remained asymptomatic since the current COVID-19 exposure
 - Persons who do not meet all 3 of the above criteria will continue to follow current quarantine guidance after exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

Leave Flexibilities: Employees and supervisors will ensure leave flexibilities are utilized to permit employees to stay at home to care for a sick family member.² .

DHS Facilities:

- a. Mask Mandate:** On January 20, 2021, President Joe Biden issued Executive Order (EO) 13991 that requires that federal workers, contractors, and the public to follow CDC protective guidelines at all times in federal buildings and on federal lands, including wearing masks correctly and consistently. Guidance for compliance with the EO was sent from DHS Senior Leadership via email, memo, and the employee website; clear instructions as well as the actual process for entering DHS facilities requiring compliance

² [Human Resources Guide for Managers and Supervisors: Pandemic and Emergency Reference](#) and [Human Resources Guide for Employees: Pandemic Emergency Reference](#).

are indicated through signage in buildings. For DHS facilities and operations, masks must be worn indoors in common areas or shared workspaces and when in potential contact with other people; some situations may also require wearing masks in public while outdoors, such as when distancing cannot be maintained. Masks can be removed for identification purposes and on occasions when the employee is in a space alone (to include a vehicle). Operational Components have task level job hazard analyses/risk assessments (JHAs/RAs) outlining all operationally appropriate employee protections, including if there are exceptions to the mask mandate.

In addition, GSA works with tenant facilities directly to adjust ventilation systems, for example introducing more outside air and using MERV 13 filters.

- b. Exceptions to Mask Mandate:** Wearing masks may be difficult for some people with sensory, cognitive, or behavioral issues. Documented exceptions for religious reasons are also relevant. If someone is unable to wear a mask properly or cannot tolerate a mask, they should not wear one, and adaptations and alternatives should be considered. Accommodations should be made for individuals with required documentation and should be in accordance with existing Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) guidance and with Department and Component policies.
- c. Hand Sanitizer:** Hand sanitizer of at least 60% alcohol will be procured by DHS and placed around workspaces and near entrances and elevators.
- d. Environmental Cleaning:** All duty stations will follow CDC guidelines and GSA Cleaning and Disinfection Procedures for cleaning a building, including all frequently touched surfaces, such as workstations, countertops, elevator buttons, and doorknobs using [EPA-List N cleaning agents](#). These enhanced cleaning procedures are anticipated to remain in effect throughout all three phases and into the foreseeable future.
- e. Physical Distancing:** Signage is in place at all building entrances to indicate proper entry requirements, including signage at all elevators indicating maximum occupancy, along with floor indicators to provide proper spacing while riding elevators. In operational mission areas (e.g. Law Enforcement Officers) where there are times physical distancing is not possible, JHAs/RAs exist to promote all available alternate protective actions. In addition to the guidance discussed below, employees should social distance by remaining 8-10 feet away from other staff while their masks are off. DHS Headquarters issued the following guidance and follows these practices in all DHS facilities:
 - i.** Workforce and all persons in facility maintain 6-foot distancing, including while in queue to enter locations and in bathrooms.
 - ii.** Office seating arrangements for administrative personnel shall be established such that employees occupy every other workstation with an empty station between each employee.

- iii. Where appropriate, barriers, ropes, tape and/or signs are in-place to communicate proper spacing and traffic flow through facilities to ensure proper distancing.
 - iv. Online meetings are encouraged to the greatest extent possible.
 - v. For in-person meetings when necessary, all conference rooms have maximum seating clearly posted and enforced by the number of and location of seating within the room.
 - vi. Workforce is encouraged to practice proper etiquette and social distancing when walking through common areas such as hallways and stairs (i.e., stay as far to the right when passing fellow employees or waiting for other employees to clear hallway/stairs before entering, etc.).
 - vii. Kitchen areas shall place limits on occupancy, including the removal of tables and/or restricting seating arrangements.
 - viii. Communal food is prohibited, and use of appliances (i.e., refrigerators, coffee makers, microwaves) is limited to ensure social distancing standards. Disinfectant and cleaners are readily visible and available to be applied after each use of kitchen appliances.
 - ix. Employees should use hand sanitizer or disinfectant wipes every time they return to the workstation to remove hand contamination received from door handles, exterior clothing, and others.
 - x. Exterior clothing may be contaminated and should be hung in the workspace but away from working or eating surfaces.
- f. **25% Office Space Occupancy Standards:** DHS performs a wide range of vital missions often engaging with the public on a daily basis through law enforcement and other critical activities. These mission sets require a very wide range of facility types and workplace occupancy standards. Therefore, it is not possible to establish occupancy rates for all mission space. However, standards for DHS administrative space have been established at 25% of normal occupancy standards at any given time during periods of high community prevalence or transmission. Guidelines have been issued by DHS Headquarters encouraging office managers to create cohorts (or teams) within an office space working alternating schedules. Employees will be placed on a schedule where they report to work one week then telework the following 2 or 3 weeks in order to ensure that occupancy levels remain at or below 25%. Exceptions to this policy will be cleared by the Secretary as advised by the agency's COVID-19 Coordination Team, in consultation with the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. The Department to date has not received any exception requests to the EO, including occupancy, due to the ability to comply with this requirement. Should an exception be received, it would need to be based the ability to provide critical services to the American People.
- g. **Entry Screening:** All employees, contractors, and visitors with identified mission functions, who are unable to telework to perform their duties, will be screened (including temperature checks and symptoms/exposure screening) prior to being allowed to enter

DHS workspaces.

- h. Meetings:** When scheduling meetings, staff should only be in-person if required by the mission and no alternatives exist. Access to other forms of virtual meeting capabilities such as teleconferencing, video, and webinars will be utilized to the maximum extent feasible. If meeting in person, business formalities such as shaking hands should be avoided as well as ensuring the physical distance of attendees at least six feet apart. Hand sanitizer should always be made available and masks worn.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): A formal JHA/RA will be used to identify hazards for specific positions and tasks and will determine whether PPE or other controls are needed for workforce protection. Several contract solutions are in place for the Department to obtain common PPE, which includes garments, gloves, goggles, hand sanitizer, respirators, and surgical masks for those that have an operational need. Other PPE items may be needed as identified in the JHA/RA.

COVID-19 Coordination Team. Components will have a COVID-19 Coordination team that includes Component leadership, human resources, occupational safety and health, counsel, and medical/public health representatives.

Remote Work and Telework:

- a. Continuity of Operations Plans will identify opportunities for remote work as appropriate:** Components will determine whether such work can be performed at a facility with lower potential exposure, or at an employee's home through telework, and that such policies are in continuity plans. With the understanding that many DHS functions and operations must be performed at a specific location or facility, consideration will be given to what functions or duties could be performed at an alternate location on a temporary basis. This can include a variety of managerial, technical, administrative, and support duties and functions that do not require direct in-person interaction with the public or co-workers. DHS offices within the Components utilize all available mechanisms, including cohort-based scheduling, staggered work times, and alternative protective workplace controls, to keep their employees safe if/when reporting to a DHS facility is required for mission continuity.
- b. Support Telework:** Telework readiness will be supported for the workforce and IT will be adequate, allowing for continued remote work for as many employees as possible.

Travel: All official international and domestic travel by DHS personnel is restricted to mission-critical travel only. Before authorizing official international or domestic travel, leadership must consider existing health and safety guidance for the specific travel locations, return restrictions and the health of traveling personnel. Work-related travel will be halted or minimized to every extent possible. CDC Travel Advisories and DHS policy on authorized travel during the pandemic will be followed. If personal travel is required, DHS employees and their families are advised to adhere to travel guidance on the [CDC travel advisory sites](#) and make sound personal decisions prior to embarking on travel. Should an employee travel for work, the employee should inform his/her supervisor before the trip to discuss any quarantine requirements and leave options upon the employee's return.

Testing Solutions: DHS awarded several Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) contracts that provide a variety of COVID-19 testing solutions for use throughout the Department. These contracts are meant to assist in the screening of multiple populations including, but not limited to, mission critical frontline personnel, persons within our protective custody, and law enforcement personnel attending training within our facilities. Procurement of diagnostic testing kits and services is facilitated via orders against the DHS Office of Procurement Operation's IDIQ. To pursue tests from the IDIQ, each DHS Component must consult their senior medical officer, legal counsel, and privacy point of contact prior to the purchase. In addition, each Component's privacy point of contact is the Component's specific plan for implementing the EO. If Department-level advice is required about privacy, Riley Dean in the Office of Privacy is in the COVID response group.

Contact Tracing: DHS employees who come in contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 positive case at a DHS worksite, will participate in contact tracing.³

Assistance for Employees and their Families:

- a. **Employee Resources Website:** An employee resources website with resources is available for employees and their families.⁴
- b. **Employee Assistance Program:** No cost, confidential support is available during this time, through the DHS Employee Assistance Program.

³ Resources are available at the [DHS Headquarters Contact Tracing Program](#) website for Components needing assistance getting started.

⁴ The [Employee Resources website](#) also provides links to sites, such as the CDC, where employees and their families can ensure they are receiving the most current and correct information regarding COVID-19.