

# COVID-19 FAQs for Employees

MARCH 30, 2020

**Thank you for reviewing the latest guidance on the COVID-19 emergency.  
Updated questions and/or responses are noted with a ►.**

## General Reminder

Placer County is committed to maintaining a respectful, productive, inclusive and equitable workplace. Therefore, all employees are expected to act with fairness, civility, integrity and to treat all coworkers and customers equitably. As we move through this challenging time these expectations and our values should be our guiding principles as we serve the public.

## CORONAVIRUS

### What is Coronavirus?

Information on Coronavirus can be found at the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) website and the [County's Coronavirus website](#).

### What are the symptoms of Coronavirus?

Symptoms can include fever, coughing, sore throat, congestion and shortness of breath.

### When do symptoms appear?

The CDC believes symptoms will appear between 2 and 14 days after exposure to the virus.

### What people are high risk?

- People 60 and older;
- People with underlying health conditions including heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes;
- People who have weakened immune systems; and
- People who are pregnant.

### What are common ways to become infected with COVID-19?

You generally need to be in close contact with someone with COVID-19 to get infected. Close contact includes scenarios like living with or caring for a person with confirmed COVID-19, being within six feet of a person with confirmed COVID-19 for about 10 minutes, or if someone with COVID-19 coughed on you, kissed you, shared utensils with you or you had direct contact with their body fluids.

## SLOWING THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS

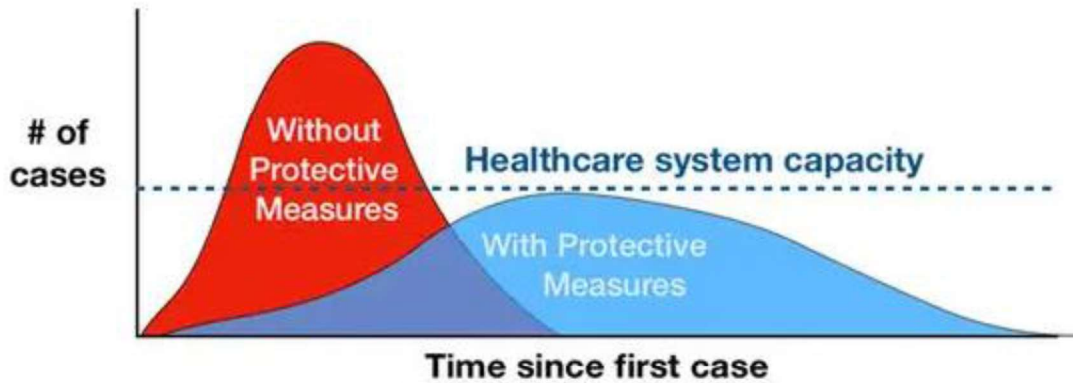
### Why should we be concerned with slowing the spread of the virus?

It is important to take protective measures in order to protect those who are most vulnerable to severe illness in our community and allow the health care system to maintain adequate

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resources to address severely ill patients. The following graphic represents the goal of slowing virus spread and “flattening the curve.”



## What can be done to prevent the spread of the virus?

1. Stay at home when sick. Do not return to work for:
  - a. At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery, defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); AND
  - b. At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
2. Frequently wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
4. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
5. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces with regular household cleaning spray.
6. Cover cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in trash.
7. Avoid travel to high-risk areas.
8. Practice social distancing as described below.

## What is social distancing?

Social distancing is a community mitigation measure used to help slow the spread of the virus. This is now a priority for County employees. Maintain approximately six feet of distance from others.

### ► What tools can I use to achieve social distancing?

- Continue to use offices and cubicles that allow coworkers to be at least six feet apart. Common areas should be used sparingly and employees should limit close interaction.

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- Utilize virtual meetings when possible. Instructions are available in the [Skype for Business User Guide](#) or the [Microsoft Teams Quick Start Guide](#).
- Postpone or cancel all non-critical meetings.
- Postpone or cancel all non-mandatory travel and trainings, such as conferences.
- Discuss temporary telework and flexible work schedules with your supervisor.

## ► **Many schools in the area have temporarily closed. Is the County closed?**

The County has transitioned to offering essential and mandatory services during this challenging period. An ongoing list of closed or limited public counter services can be found [here](#).

## **How are County facilities being cleaned?**

The County has increased its custodial services, with particular attention to high-volume areas. All employees are responsible for regularly cleaning their individual work areas and may be assigned to assist with disinfecting common surface areas.

## **Should masks be worn?**

Generally, employees are not encouraged to wear face masks. Public Health has recommended that healthy employees do not need to wear face masks. If an employee wants to wear their own face mask, they should be allowed to do so unless it is inconsistent with their job duties. Face masks may be distributed to any employee or customer presenting symptoms as they prepare to depart a County facility.

## **What can an employee do who is feeling anxious about the Coronavirus?**

Get accurate information from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) website and the [County's Coronavirus website](#).

Employees are also welcome to contact Managed Health Network to utilize Employee Assistance Program benefits, including financial and legal services. Managed Health Network is available by calling (800) 242-6220 or via their [website](#) (registration code: placercounty).

## EMPLOYEE ASSIGNMENTS

### ► **Should all employees be reporting to work?**

All County employees are Disaster Service Workers. On or after March 17, 2020, at the direction of the CEO, Department Heads identified employees performing essential job functions and directed them to work either at their normal location or via telework. All remaining employees who are available to work as Disaster Service Workers are directed to shelter at home until called upon by the County.

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## ▶ Are employees subject to the Governor's Stay at Home Order?

On March 19, Governor Newsom issued an [executive order](#) requiring Californians to stay at home. As part of critical government services and Disaster Service Workers, County employees deemed essential by their Department Heads and required to report to work on site are [exempt](#) from the order.

## ▶ What should an employee at high risk or caring for people at high risk do?

All employees are expected to work or be available to report to work. In support of this expectation, people of higher risk with pre-existing conditions may request a reasonable accommodation in an effort to support continued ability to work.

Employees should work with their supervisors to address their concerns. For leave options that may apply, see Employee Leaves.

## ▶ What happens when a qualifying family member's school or caregiver location is closed?

An employee may use all available leave balances including sick leave if a qualifying family member's school or caregiver location is closed for health-related reasons. This also applies to the closing of private schools. The employee may be assigned telework or a flexible work schedule, if feasible, with the authorization of their supervisor/manager.

For leave options that may apply, see Employee Leaves.

## ▶ If employees are working, how should they report time?

Employees should record time worked, whether on site or teleworking, according to the department's normal timekeeping guidance.

Employees working on activities related to the COVID-19 emergency must code those hours to include the Grant Worktag GR00719. Exempt employees must ensure that all hours worked beyond their normal schedule are captured through Statistical Service Units (SSU) with the Grant Worktag GR00719. It is essential that all hours worked related to the emergency be captured to assist the County with reimbursement of costs.

## ▶ If employees are available to work but have not been assigned to work on site or remotely, how should they report time?

If the employee is available to work but their Department Head, or designee, has determined their job functions are non-essential and cannot be performed remotely, the employee should code their regular work hours as COVID-19 Office Closure. Please refer to the [Workday Job Aid](#) for details.

## ▶ What if an employee is not available to work because of a pre-approved vacation, illness, medical appointment, other leave needs?

Employees who are not available to work may utilize their accrued leave balances.

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## EMPLOYEE LEAVES

### ► What should an employee with symptoms do?

Stay at home when sick. Any employee with symptoms of a communicable illness (such as fever, coughing, sore throat, congestion, and/or shortness of breath) should go home immediately. Do not return to work for:

1. At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery, defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); AND
2. At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

### ► An employee is unavailable to work or be called upon as a Disaster Service Worker for reasons including illness, caring for a sick family member, or school/daycare closures. How does the employee receive pay?

1. Accrued sick leave
2. All other accrued leave balances, such as vacation, floating holiday, compensatory time earned (CTE), or management leave

Employees needing time off on or after April 1, 2020 may also be eligible for Emergency Paid Sick Leave (see EPSL below).

### ► What is Emergency Paid Sick Leave (EPSL)?

Pursuant to the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R.6201), full-time employees needing time off work on or after April 1, 2020, may be eligible for an additional 80 hours of sick leave (pro-rated for part-time permanent employees). Employees must self-certify that one of the following criteria apply:

1. Health care provider has advised the employee to self-quarantine
2. Employee is symptomatic
3. Employee is caring for someone subject to a shelter-in-place order or quarantine advised by a health care provider
4. Employee is caring their child with school or daycare closure due to COVID-19
5. Employee is experiencing substantially-similar condition

EPSL hours will expire on December 31, 2020. Employees are not entitled to reimbursement of any unused EPSL hours upon expiration or upon termination, resignation, retirement or other separation from employment.

### ► What is the rate of pay for the 80-Hour EPSL?

EPSL hours will be paid at the employee's full regular rate of pay.

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## ► **What if an employee is unable to work for an extended period of time due to caring for an eligible child at home because of school or childcare closure?**

For leaves beginning on or after April 1, 2020, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act expands eligibility for Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) benefits. This amendment provides eligible employees with 12 weeks of protected leave in order to care for a child under 18 or dependent adult child who is home because of a school or daycare closure. There is a 10-day waiting period for paid benefits, after which employees are entitled to paid leave at two-thirds (2/3) their regular rate of pay. Employees may utilize EPSL or other accrued leaves during the waiting period and may supplement the 2/3 pay with their accrued leave balances to achieve 100% of their regular rate of pay. Employees who exhaust all accrued leave balances may also be eligible to supplement with Unemployment Insurance administered by the State of California.

## **What if an employee cannot work due to being diagnosed with COVID-19?**

An employee who has contracted COVID-19 may be eligible for a protected leave of absence under the FMLA/CFRA and wage replacement such as State Disability Insurance, depending on the labor group.

## ► **What if an employee needs to take time off work to care for an ill qualifying family member?**

The employee may be eligible to utilize protected leave for a leave of absence from work under the FMLA/CFRA to care for a qualifying family member if the family member has contracted COVID-19 and is considered to have a serious health condition. In addition to utilizing accrued leave balances, wage replacement such as Paid Family Leave administered by the State of California may be available depending on the labor group.

## **What should an employee do if they do not have enough accrued leave balances to cover a voluntary absence caused by COVID-19?**

If an employee exhausts available leave balances, unpaid hours (UPH) may be applied. If the employee has questions, they should discuss the matter with their supervisor and contact Human Resources.

## ► **What if an employee is not able to make use of vacation leave during this emergency period?**

Temporary, one-time changes to the County's vacation cash out policy have been made due to COVID-19. Rules that an irrevocable form must have been received by December 31, 2019 in order to cash out and that one half of your vacation hours must be accrued prior to cash out have been temporarily suspended.

Commencing in Pay Period 21, employees may cash out up to 80 hours of vacation leave accrued, according to the following terms:

1. Employees must be within 80 hours of the applicable vacation cap at the close of Pay Period 20 to be eligible to cash out.

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2. During this temporary change from Pay Period 21 through Pay Period 26, employees can only cash out up to 80 hours and are limited to no more than two requests.
3. A vacation cash out form should be completed for each request.
4. The maximum total vacation hours that can be cashed out in calendar year 2020 is still 100 hours, for those who qualify.

## TELEWORK

### How is a telework assignment initiated?

If a telecommuting agreement is not already in place, employees should complete the appropriate agreement and obtain approval from their supervisor. Agreements, resources, and training materials can be found on MyPlacer's [Telecommuting site](#).

### What if an employee is impacted by closures of schools and other caregiving locations? Can they be assigned telework?

An employee may use all available leave balances, including sick leave, if a qualifying family member's school or caregiver location is closed for health-related reasons. With authorization of supervisors/managers, there are also several other temporary options to address employees impacted by this emergency, such as intermittent time off, flexible work hours, alternate work schedules, and telework.

### What if an employee is having technical issues with teleworking?

Refer to MyPlacer's [Telecommuting site](#) for technical assistance. Please contact your department's IT Liaison or the IT Service Desk at (530) 889-4357 if you are unable to connect remotely to the County's network.

### What are the top ten things I need to know about telework assignments?

1. Telework allows the employee to work from a remote site other than their primary work location. It does not change their employment status or number of hours worked.
2. Employees are expected to commit their concentration on work assignments to the same extent as when working in the office.
3. Employees and supervisors should regularly document the specific work assignments and expected delivery dates. Unless prior alternate arrangements are made, due dates will be honored.
4. Employees should maintain productivity and support efforts to measure and monitor their performance.
5. Employees must be available by telephone and email during their scheduled work hours. If not immediately answered, calls forwarded from the primary work location must reach a professional voicemail message.

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6. Employees must be able to physically report to the primary work location if directed to do so.
7. Employees must obtain pre-approval to use accrued leaves, as appropriate, to attend to personal matters during telework hours, other than during rest and meal breaks.
8. Telework is not intended to be a substitute for childcare or elder care. During this emergency period, employees may need to request intermittent time off and/or flexible work hours to accommodate other responsibilities.
9. Employees must treat the telework location as an extension of the office, including a safe and ergonomic workstation.
10. Telework is not equivalent to paid administrative leave.

## ▶ **What steps should be taken by an employee working remotely with concerns about ergonomics?**

1. Test various work surfaces and chairs available at home.
2. Complete "[Ergonomics – A Training Guide for Healthy Office Workers](#)" training.
3. Discuss concerns with supervisor to brainstorm alternatives.
4. Contact Joe Morgan, Risk Management Administrator in Human Resources, at (530) 886-2606 or [jmorgan@placer.ca.gov](mailto:jmorgan@placer.ca.gov).